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SERMONS FOR
ALL THE SUNDAYS
AND FOR
THE CHIEF FEASTS OF THE YEAR

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Bishop of Sebastopolis

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SERMONS

For All the Sundays, and for the Chief Feasts Throughout the Year

By

The Right Reverend JOHN S. VAUGHAN, D.D.

Bishop of Sebastopolis

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

THE MOST REVEREND JOHN J. GLENNON, D.D.

Archbishop of St. Louis, Mo.

"If the preacher is to profit his hearers, and not to be puffed up with empty joy and presumption, he must bear in mind that his function is MORE SPIRITUAL THAN VOCAL; for though it depends on audible words, its power and efficacy is not in WORDS, but in the SPIRIT, which utters them."

—St. John of the Cross.

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Archbishop of New York

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SERMONS FOR
ALL THE SUNDAYS
AND FOR
THE CHIEF FEASTS OF THE YEAR

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

On Almsgiving

Text:—"He that hath the substance of this world, and shall see his brother in need, and shall shut up his bowels from him, how doth the charity of God abide in him?"—(*From the Epistle of the day.*)

LIFE, my brethren, is short and uncertain. The years are hurrying by, and we shall soon find ourselves standing fearful and trembling before the awful judgment seat of God. Our many friends and acquaintances, who have already passed over the borders of time into eternity help to remind us that our turn is rapidly approaching and cannot be far distant. And as this dreaded day draws nearer, we will naturally ask ourselves (that is to say, if we are prudent and wise), what we ought to do in order to appease the great Judge and to secure a favorable sentence.

The full answer to this important question cannot be given within the compass of a single discourse, so we will satisfy ourselves by setting before you to-day, my brethren, just one of the most powerful and efficacious means of satisfying for past sins and of securing a merciful reception at the hands of our Divine Master; and that is the practise of kindness, consideration, compassion and generosity toward others, especially toward those who are in poverty or distress.

The truth of this statement is founded on the fact that God, in His infinite consideration and mercy, has declared that He will be guided in His conduct toward us by our conduct toward others. Indeed, He has laid it down as a great and far-reaching principle, that His whole attitude and bearing toward ourselves will be regulated, and directed, and adjusted in correspondence with our attitude and bearing toward our less fortunate brethren; so that His behavior, if

we may so express it, will be but the reflex of our own. Are we hard-hearted? Are we devoid of tenderness and compassion in our dealings? Are we inclined rather to repulse the too eager beggar, and to turn a deaf ear to his cry for help, than to come to his aid by opportune assistance? If so, then let us beware, for we are preparing for ourselves a severe and terrible ordeal, that is to say, a judgment, searching and accurate indeed, but devoid of the element of mercy. You may perhaps urge that it is a hard statement that I am making. But, excuse me, it is not I. It is God Himself, that makes it, by the inspired lips of St. James: "Justice, *without mercy*," he says, "to him that hath not done mercy." (Chapter ii. 13.) Weigh these words well. What an appalling thought that mercy should depart from the counsels of God, and that we, with all our weaknesses, and frailties, and infirmities, should fall under the full weight of His rigorous justice. Yet this is the fate we are wooing when we refuse to exercise mercy toward others.

Nor is this the only occasion on which God speaks in this menacing tone. Again and again He repeats the same threat, even though expressed in different words. Thus, in the Book of Proverbs, He warns us that "He that stoppeth his ear against the cry of the poor, shall also cry himself, and shall not be heard." Our only hope, my brethren, is in God's hearing us. If God refuses to listen to our prayers and to come to our aid in our necessities, and to make allowance for our imbecilities, our fate is indeed a hopeless one. "If," says the Royal Prophet, "Thou, O Lord, shall mark iniquities, Lord! who shall endure it?" (Ps. cxxix.) Yet, by closing our ears to the lowly petitions of those whom we are able to help, we are inviting God to close His ears to our cries just when we stand most in need of all His loving consideration and compassion. The spiritual key that unlocks the treasury of God is the golden key of charity and brotherly love. Throw that aside, by harshness and cold indifference to the sufferings of others, and that divine treasury

remains fast locked and cannot be entered nor rifled of its treasures.

With yet greater clearness and emphasis does Jesus Christ speak when He addresses us, not through the lips of prophet or apostle, but by His own divine lips. "With whatsoever measure you have meted out to others," He tells us, "it shall be meted out to you."

Our Lord laid immense stress upon the duty of exercising charity. Indeed, this was to be the special badge or sign by which His true disciples were always to be distinguished from all others. "By this let all men know that you are my disciples, that you have love one for the other." It was therefore His will not merely to lay down the rule of our conduct, but, furthermore, to offer us the very strongest inducement to put it in practise. Therefore He opens out to us the secret principle governing His own personal conduct, and tells us that He will (if I may so express it) watch us carefully and study our disposition and attitude towards our weaker brethren, and then treat us in like manner. So that He will show immense tenderness, and gentleness, and generosity to those who have been actuated by a sympathetic spirit, and, on the contrary, will be exacting and punctilious towards those who have acted with rigor and hardness. Such is clearly the meaning of His divine declaration, *viz.*: "In whatsover measure you have meted out others, it shall be meted out to you." To impress this lesson yet more deeply on the minds of His hearers, He throws it in the form of a parable. There was once, He narrates, a certain great king (the type, indeed, of our Lord himself), who took an account of his servants, much as He will take an account of us on the last day. Now, among these dependents there was a certain servant brought up before him for judgment, who owed him ten thousand talents. And, as he had not wherewith to pay, the judge passed sentence against him, and commanded that he should be sold, and not only himself, but his wife and children as well, and all that he had, and that payment should

be made. Such was this debtor's appalling fate. Fortunately for him, however, the great king was not only powerful, but full of compassion. And the poor culprit, knowing the goodness of his heart, fell down on his face before him and cried out, no doubt with many sobs and tears: "Have patience! Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." And, wonderful to relate, "The Lord of that servant, being moved with pity," not only "let him go," but actually "forgave him all the debt."

But it is the second part of the parable that conveys the lesson that most nearly concerns ourselves. Our Lord, after drawing this picture or type of His own loving and winning nature, now draws us a portrait of a man who, while expecting mercy from God, exercises no mercy himself towards his fellow men.

He goes on to state that "when that servant was gone out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred pence," and instead of seizing the opportunity to practise the beautiful lesson he had just received and forgiving him this paltry small sum, he "laid hold of him and throttled him, saying, 'Pay what thou owest.' " "And his fellow servant, falling down, besought him saying: 'Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.' And he would not, but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt." Then, after a short time, the king came to hear of this harsh treatment. He at once summoned him before his presence, and then, looking at him with great anger and indignation, he said: "Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all the debt, because thou besoughtest me. Shouldst not thou then have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had compassion upon thee?" Then the king delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all the debt. And then our Divine Master, applying the parable, goes on to say: "So shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts." (Matt. xviii.)

The great fact which is to be drawn from this par-

able and which I wish to impress upon you to-day, is that God will treat us as we treat others, so that we may truly say that God has mercifully delivered our fate into our own hands, since it will be what we make it. If we love others, God will love us and deliver us from all evil, as He never wearies of telling us in the pages of His inspired Book: "Deal thy bread to the hungry and bring the needy and the harborless into thy house; when thou shalt see one naked, cover him, and despise not thy own flesh." And then? Ah! listen, my brethren, to the consequences, as told in the encouraging words of the same prophet: "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy health shall speedily arise, and thy justice shall go before thy face, and the glory of the Lord shall gather thee up. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall hear; thou shalt cry, and He shall reply, 'Here I am.'" (Is. lviii. 7 *et seq.*) What, my dear brethren, could be more beautiful or more inspiring than such a promise, to anyone conscious of many past sins, anxious about his own soul, and desirous of pleasing and satisfying God? Yet, this is but one of many, scattered all through the sacred volume. Listen, for instance, to the following: "Shut up thy alms in the heart of the poor, and it shall obtain help for thee against all evil. Better than the shield of the mighty, and better than the spear, it shall fight for thee against thy enemies."

Consider how far-reaching is this promise, and how it extends to everything that can possibly cause us anxiety and dread. The mere love of our neighbor and the readiness to espouse his cause renders God ready to espouse ours. It will obtain help for us, not against this or that opponent, but against them all. "It shall obtain help for us against *all* evil." And what is more, the help promised is powerful and strong, and, it would seem, even irresistible, since it is declared to be superior even to the most formidable opposition: "Better than the shield of the mighty, and better than the spear."

And why is this? How comes it that the mere dol-

ing out of alms can raise up such undreamed-of defenders, and can summon to our aid such valiant protectors? The solution is not difficult to find. It is that our Lord takes as done to Himself whatsoever we do to the least of His brethren. In giving our substance to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked, we make Christ himself our debtor, and He will return us a hundredfold whatever we have done for Him. We may indeed imagine, when we distribute our goods, that we are but feeding and clothing the beggars and mendicants of our great towns and cities, but we are mistaken. We are doing far more. We are feeding and clothing no other than Jesus Christ in the person of His poor. Have we not His own assurance for this? Does He not tell us with His infallible lips that He receives and accepts as done to Himself in person whatsoever we do to the least of His brethren? Undoubtedly! "Amen, amen, I say to you, whatever you have done to the least of these little ones, you have done unto me."

No better proof of this is to be found than in St. Matthew's stirring account of the last general judgment, when the irresistible Judge shall summon us all before Him. Try to imagine the scene. Contemplate the immense concourse of men and women of every race and language and condition standing before the great white Throne, and the supreme Judge sitting there in judgment. Before His dreadful presence trembles a poor wretch about to hear the sentence of eternal punishment passed upon him. His brief earthly life is over. Eternity stretches out before him. When once the words are uttered his fate is sealed, and no further chance will ever be offered him. He is lost, condemned. To eternal death and torment he is now about to be consigned. All hold their breath and tremble as they listen to the words so pregnant with dreadful meaning: "Depart from Me." Yes, depart from the source of every good and of every happiness. "Depart from me, ye cursed one, into everlasting fire, which was prepared indeed for the devil and his angels,

and not for you, but which you have nevertheless deserved by your sins."

Well may we imagine the thrill of horror that will pierce every heart at the sound of the words. Well may we picture the intense anxiety depicted upon every face to learn the exact nature of the crime committed and the cause of so horrible a condemnation. Nor is their desire long left unsatisfied, for the Judge proceeds to assign the reason. It is: "Because I was hungry, and you gave Me not to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave Me not to drink. I was a stranger and you took Me not in; naked, and you covered Me not," etc. But see! The accursed looks puzzled. He understands not the words that are spoken, nor how they can possibly apply to him. The Evangelist even represents him in his stress and agony as turning to the Judge and asking in amazement: "Lord, when did I see Thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, and did not minister to Thee?" (Matt. xxv. 44.) "Then He shall answer, saying: 'Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you do it to Me.'" (*Ibid.* xxv. 45.)

Truly, he had never refused Christ himself *in propria persona,* for he might have lived hundreds of years after the time of Christ; but he had refused, and perhaps often, to administer to Him *indirectly,* and in the person of the destitute and the unfortunate, who are Christ's representatives, and who are to be found in every age as well as in every country. And, in consequence of his hardness of heart and want of compassion and generosity toward them, he brought down upon himself the stern rebuke and the crushing sentence of eternal reprobation.

It would be well for you, my dear brethren, to read the whole passage in St. Matthew's Gospel for yourselves, and to allow those inspired and infallible words to sink down deep in your hearts, in order that you may be urged and encouraged while there is yet time, to "make friends with the mammon of iniquity," and to purchase, as it were, by your generous donations

and general benevolence, the favor and the approval of your future Judge. "Alms," says holy Tobias, "delivereth from death, and the same is that which purgeth away sins and maketh to find mercy and life everlasting" (xii. 9). So, again, a special blessing is invoked in the Psalms upon those who "understand concerning the needy and the poor," and it is expressly stated that "the Lord will deliver them in the evil day." (Ps. xl. 1, 3.)

We might quote many other texts in further support of our contention, but enough has already been said to convince any true believer of the immense efficacy and importance of cultivating a generous spirit. In these days, we have to be especially on our guard against avarice and the inordinate love of money, for it is an age in which everyone is striving to be rich and to amass larger and larger fortunes. This desire to acquire and to add possession to possession breeds a hardness of heart which is the very antithesis of that compassionate solicitude for others which Christ so strongly inculcates. It produces a love of self and an indifference about others which dries up the wells of charity and excites the righteous indignation of God, who is the Father of all, and who would have us treat each other as brothers and sisters.

We cannot all give in equal measure, but each should give according to his means. "If thou have much," says Tobias, "give abundantly; but if thou have but little, take care even to so bestow willingly a little." (Tob. iv. 8, 9.) God will reward you not according to the amount given, but according to the measure of the sacrifice made. This is made abundantly manifest by the words of Christ, when he watched the poor widow casting her mite (which equals but a cent) into the treasury of the temple. "Amen, I say to you, this woman hath cast in more than all the others, for they did cast in of their abundance; but she, of her want, cast in all she had, even her whole living." (Mark xii. 43.)

Prepare, then, beloved brethren, for the great ac-

counting day by the exercise of a noble generosity; for then, in the words of Ecclesiasticus, iii.: "You shall be built up in justice, and in the day of affliction you shall be remembered, and your sins shall melt away as ice in the fair warm weather." (Eccl. iii. 17.)

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Devil and His Angels

Text:—"Be sober and watch, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist ye, strong in faith; knowing that the same affliction befalleth your brethren, who are in the world."—(*From the Epistle of the day.*)

GOD, my dear brethren, is infinitely exalted beyond His creatures. In fact, He is so absolutely and so immeasurably superior to every other being that we may truly say that there is no quality or attribute of God, which we may predicate, in the same sense, of any other. We say that "God is good," and we also say that a Saint or an Angel "is good." We employ the same term in both cases. But, though we use the same term, we do not mean at all the same thing. Thus, in a Saint or an Angel, goodness is a quality, a character, something acquired, and added to its nature, and distinct from itself. In God, on the other hand, goodness is not really a quality at all. It is His very essence. It is Himself. Hence, it is not strictly accurate to affirm that God possesses goodness. No. He does not *possess* goodness; He *is* goodness. And the same must be said of His wisdom, His power, His beauty, and the rest. Even existence itself cannot be predicated of a creature as it is of God. When we say: "God is," and when we say a "creature is," we do not intend the word "is" to be interpreted in the same way in both cases. A creature *is,* or exists in a certain sense, but at each succeeding minute it owes its existence to another. God, on the other hand, is self-existing. A creature is wholly dependent on God; but God is absolutely independent and owes nothing to any external being. So again, God's existence is essential; but not the existence of any mere creature.

But perhaps the great fact about God, which, more than any other in our eyes, marks Him off from all other beings, is that He has existed from all eternity. Every other being had a beginning. He had none. The earth, the universe, the whole race of men, the glorious choirs of angels, all had a beginning. God alone had none. He alone always was. Travel back in thought, over the ages that have run, and as you recede step by step into the past, you will find one creature after another disappearing till, at last, you reach a period when God alone exists! Not a star glimmers in all the length and breadth of possible space. Not an angel worships before the Infinite and the Omnipotent. Besides God Himself, nothing is.

What a light this thought throws on the majesty of God! How completely it removes Him, even in our eyes, from all the limitations and restrictions of creatures.

Let us contemplate Him before any creature was. He stands alone. For eternity He has been alone. Alone, yet never lonely. Never weary, or solitary, or sad, as we should be, or in need of anything whatsoever. But ceaselessly and supremely and infinitely happy; needing no one, and containing within Himself the inexhaustible source of every conceivable and of every inconceivable delight. For the whole of an eternity He had so lived. At last, at a given moment, He determined to exercise His creative power and to call into being others, who might share in His happiness and become the privileged partakers of His joy.

Now the first creatures whom He summoned into existence were pure intelligences; spiritual beings with no admixtures of matter in their compositions. These we call angels. Nobody knows their exact number, but theologians seem to agree that it must be immense, prodigious and almost incalculable. They are believed to far outnumber the whole race of men. We know not for how many centuries the earth will still endure, nor how many million more of men may yet be born; but, if we add together all that have ever

been, from the time of Adam to the present, and all those still to come, the number of the angels probably will be found to exceed the entire sum. Furthermore, they were created beautiful and charming beyond compare, and were endowed with great and precious gifts. Yet, though all were exquisitely beautiful, all were different. As flower differs from flower, or as gem differs from gem, though each has a distinct beauty of its own, so is it with the Angels. Their minds, too, were keen, quick, and penetrating: so that they are often represented in art and painting as heads with wings. The head is to suggest mind and intellect, and the wings quickness and subtlety and the power of rising to sublime heights in the contemplation of God and Divine things.

Now it must be borne in mind that the Angels, when first created, were not already in possession and enjoyment of the Beatific Vision. They, like ourselves, had to win their way and to prove their worth by the exercise of virtue and especially of the virtues of loyalty and obedience. Just as man had his trial, so they had theirs. Regarding the exact nature of this trial, the Holy Scriptures are silent; but theologians, who have given the question much thought, have explained it as follows:

God put the obedience and the loyalty of the Angels to the proof by revealing to them the Mystery of the Incarnation of God the Son. He unfolded His design and explained to them how He was about to create a new order of beings, inferior to themselves, namely, the race of man. It would be a race of individuals composed of matter and spirit, and not a purely spiritual creation, as they were. In short, a race "a *little less* than the Angels." (Heb. ii. 7.) Furthermore, they were informed that He, the eternal and infinite Creator of Heaven and earth, would, in the fullness of time, take upon Himself that same lower nature and engraft Himself into the human family and become truly man, and just like other men "in all things, excepting sin." (Heb. iv. 15.) And finally they were

clearly given to understand that they would have to pay the same homage and adoration to God in His human nature as in His Divine nature. In short, that they would have to fall down and worship and recognize as their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, true God but also true Man.

To these superb and magnificent Angels the trial may have been a very severe one. To ask them, before they were confirmed in grace, to accept as their sovereign and supreme Lord the Man-God, crucified, scourged, insulted and humiliated, and smitten and spat upon, was perhaps to ask much. In any case, as the event proved, it was to ask more than many of these gorgeous and splendid Spirits were prepared to give. As they contemplated on the one hand their own exalted station, their noble gifts, their unrivalled beauty and dazzling magnificence, and, on the other hand, as they gazed in spirit upon the lowly Babe of Bethlehem, on the "Man of Sorrows," sweating blood in the garden of Gethsemani, or the Divine Victim stretched in agony on the Cross of Calvary, a thousand feelings and emotions must have striven for the mastery. Pride and self-love, and anger and hatred and disdain and contempt were probably aroused by the sight of God clothed in the rags of our humanity, suffering and in ignominy for love of us. Indeed, "a worm and no man" as the Prophet foretold. (Psalm xxi. 7.)

Millions of those Blessed Spirits were wise enough and loyal enough to rise superior to the temptation. They stood firm and true and ready to adore the incarnate God, and were then confirmed in grace and were rewarded by the full possession and enjoyment of God's unveiled presence forevermore. But millions of others refused to bow down in worship of "the Son of Man" and turned a deaf ear to every argument. Of these last Satan was the chief. It is generally held that Satan or Lucifer was not merely an angel, but that he was one of the loveliest and most exquisitely beautiful of them all, belonging to the Or-

der of the Seraphim. But, alas! he was, if we may so express ourselves, drunk with a sense of his own excellence. The very splendor and magnificence of the qualities with which God had endowed him, instead of making him more grateful and submissive, served but to arouse within him a spirit of insubordination and arrogance and were seemingly the chief cause of his terrible fall. He was, in the first place, unwilling to do honor or to humble himself before any man; even before the Man-God. In the second place, he was jealous that God should have passed over the angelic nature, to assume an inferior nature, *viz.*, the nature of man. Indeed, his whole heart sickened at the thought. So far from being willing to acknowledge the absolute dominion of Jesus Christ, and to render Him the honor due from a creature to its Creator, he was rather inclined to dispute the sovereignty of the Almighty Himself. Referring to this rebellious and presumptuous spirit, and (as it were) addressing him, the Prophet breaks out in inspired words: "Thou sayest in thy heart, I will ascend into Heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will ascend above the height of the clouds. I will be like to the most high." (Isaias xiv.) Such were the aspirations of his proud heart; such was the goal of his ambition. But, adds the holy Prophet: "Thou shalt be brought down to hell, into the depths of the pit." (Isaias xiv. 14, 15.) Satan was the great leader of the rebellion, but many millions flocked to his standard. Instead of turning a deaf ear, they gave heed to his burning words, and, being fired by his example, they, like him, stubbornly refused to render homage to the Divine Person of the Son of God, clothed in our weak human nature.

The test of their loyalty had been applied. They had been tried in the fire of temptation, and had been found wanting. And now they were to reap the fruit of their stubbornness and their pride and were cast headlong out of Heaven into the lowest depths of the bottomless pit. "How art thou fallen from Heaven,

O Lucifer, who didst rise in the morning? How art thou fallen, etc." (Isaias xiv. 12.) So, too, our Divine Lord, addressing the Apostles, said: "I saw Satan, like lightning, falling from Heaven." (Luke x. 18.) St. John in his Apocalypse refers to the same event, when he tells us that: "the great dragon was cast out of Heaven, that old serpent, who is called the devil and satan, who seduceth the whole world." (Ch. xii. 9.) So insidious was the evil example of Lucifer that a third part of the heavenly host followed him in his apostasy and shared his awful fate. This is clearly indicated by St. John in the highly figurative language of the Apocalypse, where he writes: "the tail of the great red dragon," by which is meant the devil, "drew down a third part of the stars of Heaven." (Apoc. xii. 4.) From these words it is evident that a third part of the angelic host fell into sin and were in consequence driven into the abyss. They forfeited all claim to eternal Beatitude. They were no longer in a position to possess and enjoy God. From beautiful Angels they became transformed into hideous and hateful devils. But, though their state and condition had changed, their nature remained the same. Even though fallen, even though condemned to eternal torments, they still retained the keenest intellects and the most subtle minds and wills, as strong now in hate as they were before in love. Now it is precisely against these powerful and unscrupulous adversaries that we are warned again and again in Holy Writ.

But you will ask, my dear brethren, why should we fear them? What reason have they to hate and to persecute us? Why should they strive to encompass our ruin? What have WE done to arouse their enmity?

There are several answers. They hate us, Firstly, through jealousy. They are jealous of us because, instead of God becoming an Angel, He chose to become a man. They envy man this tremendous honor, and this stimulates them to do all in their power to

wound him, and to injure him, and to destroy his spiritual life.

Secondly, they hate God, who has punished them and deprived them of their heavenly thrones, and consequently vent their spite on us, who are made to His image and likeness. Since they are unable to touch God Himself *directly,* they seek to injure and to insult Him *indirectly* in the person of those whom He has redeemed with His most precious Blood.

Thirdly, they are aroused to a still greater indignation and to a fiercer resentment, because they know that man, though much inferior to them by nature, is destined by grace to occupy a place in the Kingdom from which they have been cast forth. Nay, more, they know that he is destined, by the help of God's supernatural assistance, to mount up to the very Thrones that would have been occupied by themselves had they only remained faithful. It is bad enough, they feel, to have been ousted from these exalted positions themselves, because they would not render supreme homage to the Incarnate God. But what makes this punishment ten thousand times more bitter and insupportable is that the inferior creature Man, a creature formed in part of the vile clay, fashioned from the slime, living on material food, and, in this life at least, dependent on matter—if faithful to grace is one day to ascend into Heaven and to share in the life of God, and to become friend and companion and fellow citizen of their former associates, the Angels, who remained steadfast and loyal when they themselves fell miserably.

With the intensest envy eating at their hearts the evil spirits are determined, in so far as is possible, to hinder us from attaining to that position from which they have been excluded. By day and night they seek to lead us into sin that we may never reach those heavenly places. Moreover, their hate, which burns as a fierce inextinguishable flame, is not an impotent nor an inactive hate. Quite the contrary. It urges them on to continual action, so that did God not restrain

them and put a limit to their power (as we see He did in the case of Job), our position would be a most dangerous and desperate one. God, in His mercy, limits their action, but He does not altogether forbid them to try and tempt us, since we are here on earth for the special purpose of being thus exercised. Only, He will not allow us to be tempted beyond our power, but "will always make issue with the temptation that we may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. x. 13.)

It is not the fashion in these days to speak of the devil, or even to believe in him. The world has grown impatient of this doctrine and would even persuade us that there are no such beings as demons. They may employ the word "devil," but they will explain that they mean nothing more by that than an abstraction. They altogether deny the existence of a personal devil and ridicule the idea. In their minds the devil is not a living, acting, active agent; ineed, he is not a person at all, but merely "that inward tendency to evil, which is to be found, in a greater or lesser degree, in every man." When they speak of the devil they assure us that they mean nothing more than our corrupt nature, base passions, and, in a word, the lower part of our nature, which is always provoking us to self-indulgence and inciting us to offend God.

But such explanations will not square with the plain facts of either history or of revelation. The world may be too proud to admit that it can be troubled and tempted and led astray and cajoled by these invisible foes. It may prefer to accept the entire responsibility of its immortalities, its injustices, and its wickedness. But the fact remains.

Brethren, however marvellous and strange it may appear, there is not the shadow of a doubt but that devils, real and substantial, as well as malignant, are ever following us about and plotting our downfall. To throw up such a belief would be to deny the Bible, the teaching of the Apostles and Christianity itself. Let us call to mind some few authentic instances of the devil's industry and cunning, recorded by the in-

spired writers. In the opening chapters of Genesis we find the devil tempting and arguing with Eve and leading her into an act of disobedience. In this passage he is clearly represented as a being, totally distinct from herself. In fact, he has a regular passage of arms with her before he succeeds in prevailing upon her to ruin both herself and her posterity by sin.

There is another striking instance in the Book of Job. There we are told how the devil actually sought permission from Almighty God to molest and to try the loyalty of "a simple and upright man, of the name of Job." God gave him the requisite leave, and from that moment the evil one began to afflict him in every conceivable way. Addressing Satan or the devil, God said: "Behold all that Job hath is in thy hands; only put not forth thy hand upon his person." (Job i. 12.) And, on the strength of that Divine permission, without which he would have been powerless, the devil brought down disaster after disaster, and affliction after affliction, upon the patient head of this great servant of God. If therefore there be any truth in the inspired pages of Holy Writ, the devil and his angels must be very real persons indeed, and of dreadful and superhuman power.

These instances of the hatred and of the cunning and power of evil spirits are but specimens taken from a multitude that are to be found in the Old Testament, and they may be supplemented by many of similar instances narrated in the New Testament. Thus, again and again do we read of Jesus Christ casting out devils from those who had been actually possessed by them. Sometimes these fiends manifested their presence in a quite remarkable manner, as for instance in the case of the man spoken of by St. Mark, chapter v, "who has his dwelling in the tombs, and whom no man could bind, even with chains." Our Blessed Lord commanded the unclean spirits to go out of him. And as they could not resist the power of God, and knew it was hopeless to oppose the Divine will, they besought Christ that, at all events, they

might be suffered to enter into "a great herd of swine that were feeding close by." And St. Mark continues: "And Jesus immediately gave them leave, and the unclean spirits, going out, entered into the swine; and the herd, with great violence, was carried headlong into the sea, being about two thousand; and were stifled by the water" (v. 12, 13).

Now all the circumstances here recounted by the Evangelist prove beyond question that the existence of evil spirits is a positive fact, which no efforts of unbelievers can explain away. They are beings that can come and go, and that cannot only be forced to issue from the body of a man, but which can then enter into and take forcible possession of the bodies of irrational animals.

Or we may pass to another example, to be found in the thirteenth Chapter of St. John's Gospel, where the betrayel of Jesus by Judas is definitely declared to have been *at the instigation of the devil.* The Apostle's very words are: "The *devil* put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus." St. Peter also speaks of the devil as the cause of sin in another historical case. For when Ananias and his wife Saphira approached St. Peter and attempted to deceive him with lying words, the Prince of the Apostles upbraided them, saying: "Ananias, why hath Satan tempted thy heart, that thou shouldst lie to the Holy Ghost?" Even our Blessed Lord frequently refers to the devil's malignant desires and evil efforts to seduce the Apostles themselves from their allegiance to Him. Addressing His chosen ones, He warns them, saying: "Behold, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee." (Luke xxii. 31.) Thus God incarnate warns us to look upon the devil as an enemy and as a power to be reckoned with, and as one who is to be overcome only by having recourse to earnest prayer.

But in addition to these and innumerable other instances of the devil's assaults we have the most emphatic and explicit teaching on this subject by two

of the greatest of the Apostles, *viz.*, by SS. Peter and Paul. St. Peter writes that "The devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour; whom resist ye, strong in faith; knowing that the same affliction befalleth your brethren who are in the world." (From the day's Epistle.) While St. Paul reminds us in yet more terrifying words that "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness; against the spirits of wickedness in high places." (Eph. vi. 12.)

But we have said enough regarding the facts of the case. The practical question, which we should all ask ourselves, is: Do we realize these momentous facts? Do they affect our life and conduct? How many of us are vividly conscious that day by day, and even hour by hour, we have to measure our strength against so great and so subtle an enemy? Who shall say how many of our sins and faults and failings are committed at the suggestion of the devil! Far more probably than we are generally inclined to admit. When the traitor Judas was led astray; when the love of gold caused him to forget his duty towards his Divine Master, and to sell Him to His enemies, did he realize at the time that the fiend was at his elbow, cunningly urging him on? And that he was in reality listening to the malicious suggestion of the fallen Seraph? Probably not. If he had done so he would have been more on his guard and would have hesitated before accepting the advice of so hateful a counsellor. Yet, as a matter of fact, it was the devil. St. John tells us as much: "The *devil put it into the heart of Judas* to betray Jesus."

As he prevailed over the Apostle, so will he prevail over us, unless we guard against his wiles and arm ourselves by earnest, frequent, and fervent prayer. St. Peter bids us resist him, "Strong in Faith," for the first condition of success is to be found in the exercise of Faith. We must believe in the existence of these malignant spirits; in their power and hostility,

and reckon with them as with real visible enemies. Further, we must be "sober and watch." If only we can be prevailed upon to act up to these admonitions of St. Peter we shall be secure indeed. For the devil cannot force our will. He can only suggest evil and urge us to follow our passions and unruly inclinations and stir up the evil disposition lying dormant within us. But, by the goodness of God, we are always master of the situation. The devil can never actually enter our hearts nor sully our consciences unless we first fling open the gates and let him in. Of this we have the explicit promise of God, who declares that "no evil shall happen to him that feareth the Lord, but in temptation God will keep him and deliver him from all evil." (Eccl. xxxiii. 1.)

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Text:—"The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared to the glory to come."—(*From the Epistle of the day.*)

WE are assured in the inspired pages of the Book of Job, that "Man, born of a woman, and living for a short time, is filled with many miseries" (xiv. 1). Nor shall we feel any disposition to question the truth of this statement, for our own experience will bear it out to the full. Life, even for the most favored, is short, and soon over, yet even for the brief time that it endures, it is far from being an unmixed good. We enter the world with a cry of pain, and this cry is often repeated. Even as small children, we are exposed to a variety of ailments and sicknesses which carry off a large proportion of the race before reaching the use of reason. If we pass these critical stages, we find ourselves exposed to trials and tribulations of another kind. Perhaps we have to work hard for our living, and to do the will of another rather than our own. Then we may suffer from fatigue, from weariness, from hunger and thirst, and from the heats of summer and the piercing cold of winter. We lose our friends by death; or those whom we have confided in turn against us. We meet various disappointments. Our most cherished schemes come to nothing. Our business fails. We are robbed of our hard earned gains, and are reduced to poverty. Or, perhaps, we make an unhappy marriage, and find sorrow where we looked for perfect bliss; or we contract some incurable disease, or meet with a serious accident, which deprives us of the use of hands or of feet; or we become blind or paralyzed or fall into consumption. Wherever we may be, and whatever may be our profession or our business, it is quite certain that trials and troubles of one kind or another will find us out.

It is a part of God's design that we should be tried. He has so arranged that thorns and briars should strew the path which we have to tread. Indeed, He wishes us to realize that this earth is not our real Home, and that "we have not here a lasting city." His desire is that we should lift our eyes from the sad and sorrow-laden earth, and fix them on the bright and glorious Kingdom above, which He in His goodness has prepared for all who love Him and keep His commandments. For, whatever we may think of the sufferings of this world which are numerous and most varied, yet it is quite certain that they are "not worthy to be compared to the glory to come."

The strange thing is that so few care to console themselves, and to sustain their sinking hearts by reflecting on the unspeakable delights that are awaiting them in the Home of their heavenly Father. Let us then occupy a few minutes this morning in considering some of the pleasures awaiting us there.

The essential joy of Heaven consists, of course, in the secure and eternal possession of God. As He is infinite in every perfection, it stands to reason that the joy arising from the contemplation of Him must exceed, by an immeasurable distance, the joy of contemplating any mere finite being, or, indeed, all finite beings united. But this morning my intention is to speak not of the essential, but of one of the lesser of heavenly joys, namely the joy of being once again united to those whom we have loved and lost in this life.

It will be well to introduce this subject by reminding ourselves that God has not made each human being a solitary and independent creature. On the contrary, He has knit together in the closest of bonds the entire human race. He has created relationships and forged links and connections between one member and another, which are a part of our very nature, and which add very considerably to our general well-being. Consider the enjoyment arising from the intercourse between parents and their children; between

brothers and sisters, husbands and wives; as well as that which is experienced by life-long friends, and school companions, and the rest. Consider further, the many and most varied delights which we may receive from other men and women, whose special gifts are clearly intended for the good pleasure of others beside themselves. I mean gifts which arouse our interest, our admiration, or our wonder. Such as those possessed by famous singers, whose melodious voices enthrall us; and by renowned actors, whose admirable representations enchant us; and by accomplished players on the organ, the piano, the violin, and on countless other instruments. Or think what we owe to the celebrated artists, and sculptors, and painters, whose talents are revealed in innumerable public galleries and museums, as well as in cathedrals and private houses. What a treat it is to stand before the most famous products of human genius, and to relish the exquisite workmanship of the most gifted of our race.

But not these alone are laboring for our pleasure and our profit. All over the world man is using his mind or his hands employing his time for the benefit of other men. He is forever bestirring himself and exercising his talents to promote in some measure the welfare of his fellows. Take the simplest illustration. We sit down to our breakfast, but before beginning our meal we take a general survey of our surroundings. The table on which the food is spread is of mahogany; it was cut down by Spanish laborers in far off Mexico for our special use, then placed on board a vessel and brought over to this country; then carefully formed by skilled artisans into our present dining-room table. The white linen cloth, spread over it, was once a portion of a field of bright green flax. But the flax was mown down, and bleached, and then woven by industrious hands and prepared till it attained its present state. The coffee, now steaming before us, was gathered in Ceylon or Java as a greenish berry, and after passing through many hands,

each of which has contributed something to its perfection, it has found its way to our breakfast table. Perhaps the butter was churned for us by some dairymaid in Cork, and then sent across the channel from Ireland, while the sugar after being carefully and laboriously extracted from the sugar cane, growing in Brazil or the West Indies, has been shipped to some English port, and sold over the counter in this very town.

We mention these few instances as mere illustrations of the wonderful way in which men and women, in all parts of the world, are constantly contributing to the general happiness and prosperity of all the rest. They may never think of this community of interests. They may be giving their services quite unconscious of the benefits they are conferring on others. They may even be the most selfish of laborers, and see nothing and care for nothing but the wages they are earning. That is a matter on which we express no opinion. It does not affect our argument. All we are now concerned about is to show how God, by His most wonderful and divine power, has drawn men together and made them all partners, as it were, in one great concern, namely, the welfare and the prosperity of the race. As it is not by accident that all men are descended from the same original stock, and that all are the children of the selfsame parents, so it is not by accident that all are set working and toiling, not for themselves alone, nor even solely for those living in their immediate neighborhood, but for the much wider interests of mankind in general.

Now, it is a principle in theology, that God does not destroy nature, but rather perfects it. If He has bound men together in this world, He will most certainly give them an interest in one another in the next. If He causes all to be a source of advantage to all in this life, He will apply the same principle, in some supernatural way, in the life to come. If there be a happiness arising from the intimate and familiar society of friends, or from the close sympathy and love

of husbands and wives, of parents and children, and of brothers and sisters, and so forth, this source of happiness will not disappear but be purified and spiritualized and intensified in the Kingdom of Heaven.

There are those who fancy that the glorified soul will be so entirely and so completely absorbed in God as to be unable to think of any one else. And this idea probably arises from the fact that the Saints, who have been favored with ecstasies in this world, have, for the time being, lost all consciousness of other things. So rivetted have been their minds on God, that nothing could disturb them, or distract them, till the ecstasy ended and they came to themselves. But a Saint in Heaven is in a very different condition to a Saint on earth. In the latter case he is but a poor feeble mortal, whose mind is incapable of any great or exalted effort; but in the former case, the Saint has been lifted above nature and clothed with glory as with a garment. All his faculties have been strengthened and extended and rendered capable of exercising powers of which we can form not the slightest conception. In this world man's mind is so restricted and so narrow, that even the least glimmer of God's sensible presence in the soul is enough to throw all else into darkness, but this is *merely a consequence of man's present imperfection.* When he is raised to a state of glory, it will be far otherwise. Then while, on the other hand, he will see God face to face, and understand His infinite perfections, in a measure utterly inconceivable to us now, yet he will be able, at the same time, to realize the beauty of creatures, and to enjoy the accidental joys arising from the society of both angels and of Saints.

But will the Blessed know each other in the next world? Will friend be able to grasp the hand of friend? Will parents be able to clasp their children to their breasts, and brothers and sisters greet one another with a holy kiss? Most undoubtedly. For Heaven is not like a Carthusian monastery, in which each monk lives and feeds and recreates himself in

holy solitude, and in which strict silence is observed, and scarcely any intercourse is allowed. No. The Holy Scripture itself presents Heaven to us rather as a charming home, where the heavenly Father gathers around Him all His beloved children, and where all rejoice together and derive endless delight from their mutual intercourse. The exigencies of human language oblige the inspired writers to express themselves in a very mundane way, still, their meaning is clear. Even our Lord, addressing the Apostles, says: "I dispose to you a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table," and again: "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of my house, and shall drink of the torrent of my pleasure." (Psalm xxxv.) Being all sons and daughters of one and the same heavenly Father, all the Blessed will be associated and united as true brothers and sisters. They will all sit at the same table, and drink from the same torrent of delights, and (Psalm lxiv.) they shall be "filled with the good things of God's house." This does not mean that we shall consume material food, or that we shall be in any need of physical nourishment. No. The words are to be taken spiritually. They mean that all the blessed will be united by the cords of love, that they will rejoice together in the presence of the common Father of them all, and that they will revel in each other's society, as children returning home together from school, or as conquerors after some glorious victory. "They shall rejoice," exclaims Isaias, the prophet, "as laborers rejoice in the harvest, or as conquerors rejoice after taking their prey, when they divide the spoils." (Is. ix.)

These and innumerable other texts that might be cited, prove, beyond a doubt, that it is God's intention that all who enter into Heaven should be most intimately acquainted with one another, should share the selfsame joys and delights and should find abundant happiness in each other's company. Unless, indeed, all the Blessed are united as members of the same great family, and inmates of the same sublime

Home, and as children of the same heavenly Father, it would be utterly absurd to picture Heaven for us as a magnificent royal banquet, where the guests are invited to meet one another, in presence of their great sovereign Lord and King. Yet this is the figure under which we are asked by the inspired writers to picture for ourselves, in some faint and unworthy way, the social pleasures of the world to come.

Though the number of the elect may exceed the number of the sands that lie on the seashore, yet not one will be unknown to us. Though, when on earth, they may have dwelt in strange countries, which we have never visited, and have spoken a language which we have never heard, and have run their course, centuries before we were born, yet we shall recognize them as brothers, and treat them and love them as such. For however it may have been in the past, "Now," says St. Paul, speaking to all Christians, "you are no more strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the Saints and the domestics of God." (Heb. xii. 21.)

If this be the undoubted fact as regards even those most remotely connected with us, it is still truer as regards those who were our nearest and our dearest relations, and also as regards friends and masters and teachers and superiors, to whom, perhaps we have owed an immense deal in this life. To these we shall feel especially drawn by feelings of gratitude and love, for then we shall realize the extent of our obligations as we can never do in this life.

No one can peruse the works or read even the letters of the Saints and renowned Fathers of the Church without meeting many passages suggestive of this doctrine. Again and again we find them writing to console the bereaved, amid their tears, with the assurance that the beloved husband or daughter or other relative, whom they mourn, is awaiting them before the throne of God. And that they will be again united with them, never more to be torn asunder by death.

"The souls of the just made perfect," says Honorius d'Autun, "know all the inhabitants of their celestial home. They know even their names, their nationality, their merits, as though they had always lived with them." Similarly, St. Augustine, preaching to his flock, said: "In Heaven, my brethren, you will know all the saints, not only because you will see them face to face (for that would be but an external acquaintance), but because you will see their whole life and being reflected in God." St. Jerome, writing to a disconsolate widow, exhorts her to console herself with the thought that her dead husband, Lucinius, is now reigning with Christ. "He looks down upon you," says this doctor of the Church, "from his throne above, he supports you in your sorrow, he prepares a place for you near himself in the Kingdom of God." St. Augustine, addressing another widow, expresses himself thus: "We have by no means lost those who have departed out of this world, from which we shall soon be called ourselves; we have but sent them on before us to the bright realms above, where they will be loved the more, even as they are the better known. (*"Ubi nobis erunt quanto notiores, tanto utique cariores."*) In the next world, you and your husband will know each other far more intimately than you have known, or could have known each other in this. For God will bring to light even the hidden things of darkness, and will manifest the thoughts of every heart, and no one will have anything to conceal or to be ashamed of, for all will be perfect, and all will be intimately united in one heart and in one mind.

St. John Chrysostom, writing to a wife, who had just lost a most devout and saintly husband says: "Cease to weep; rather rejoice at the glory that Therasius is now enjoying. Live as holy a life as he has lived, and you will soon meet him in Heaven, where, during endless ages, you will be more closely united to him than you ever were here on earth, not indeed by the corporal bonds of marriage, but by other and far nobler ties. The former do but unite the body,

whereas the latter purer, holier and more delightful, unite the soul."

These are but a few specimens from the works of Saints and Fathers of the Church. They might be almost indefinitely added to, did time permit. But enough has been said to convince us of the general truth of the consoling doctrine, that among the accidental rewards of Heaven one of the most cheering will be the rejoining of friends, and the coming together of those who have loved one another on earth, with a special and life long devotion.

What has been said of the Saints holds good, of course, of the Angels and Archangels, whose society we shall enjoy, just as we enjoy the society of the glorified children of Adam. They are equally our friends and our companions, and their presence will add immensely to our general happiness and content. But we must reserve this subject to another time.

In conclusion, let me say that we have every reason to return thanks to God for preparing for us such a truly sublime future, and for deigning to reunite the many broken unions of this life. But while we should appreciate the favor as highly as possible, we must never forget that after all the society of those most dear to us, however delightful, can never for one moment be compared to the delight derived from the presence of God Himself. There are many "accidental" pleasures and joys, but there is no pleasure or joy that can bear the slightest comparison to the supreme and unspeakable transport of the soul arising from the contemplation of the unveiled and uncreated Beauty and Perfection of God Himself. All else are but accidental sources of happiness; God alone is the essential source. Let us so live that we may one day secure admission into His unveiled presence, there to rejoice forevermore with the saints and angels, so long as God is God. Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

External Religion

Text:—"Unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."—(*From the Gospel of the day.*)

THE above words, my dear brethren, were addressed by our Divine Lord to His disciples and followers, in whose minds they must have caused considerable wonder and surprise, for the Pharisees were generally looked upon as men of quite exceptional virtue and rectitude; and the ordinary Jew considered himself well nigh perfect, if only he could imitate the exceptional sanctity of these ostentatious leaders.

Such is the erring judgment of poor, blind mortals, who can indeed see what is external, but who have no power to read the secrets of the heart. Yet, though we may deceive our fellow creatures, we can not deceive Almighty God, who observes all our most secret thoughts and watches the most subtle emotions of our hearts.

Now, what did Jesus, the incarnate God, see in the Pharisees? He was not misled by their apparent rectitude and zeal for divine things, for His gaze penetrated into the very centre of their souls; and He found that, so far from being pleasing to God, they were objects of His detestation. It was not merely that they were not the models of virtue that they were thought to be. They were not even leading ordinary good lives. So far from walking on the path to Heaven, they were sauntering leisurely along "the broad road that leads to destruction." In a word, their conduct was such as to deserve eternal punishment at the hands of the infinitely just Judge. Of this truth, the words of Jesus Christ leave us in no manner of doubt, for He openly warns us all, that

"unless our justice abound more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, we shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." In short, He informs us that the conduct and behavior of these men will exclude *them* from Heaven, and that if we do no better, we too shall share their appalling fate.

Now, what was it that our Lord saw in these much esteemed men, which would most certainly lead to their ultimate condemnation? No doubt the Pharisees made great professions of holiness, and were forever insisting on the observance of even the most minute points of the law. But there was one thing that vitiated all their actions, even those which appeared to be the most admirable, and that was their base and unworthy motives. If we give the matter our serious attention, we shall see that our Lord found fault with them chiefly on three grounds. He reproached them in the first place because, while attaching immense importance to the letter of the law, they utterly disregarded its spirit: and while insisting on external observances, they remained wholly unconcerned as to the purity or to the impurity of the intention. In the second place, He condemned them because, while burdening themselves with all sorts of trivial and unessential observances, they neglected to carry out the more important and essential precepts of the law. In the third place, He denounced them because of their detestable and horrible hypocrisy. Their overweening desire was to be seen and approved of and admired by men. Whereas they troubled themselves but little, if at all, as to how they might appear in the eyes of God.

Let us examine these three defects somewhat more in detail. Firstly, then, it is certain that the Pharisees made all virtue to consist in *external* observations. So long as they were faithful to this external obedience, they considered themselves to be irreproachable, however defective and even evil might be their motives and intentions. Hence, it happened that while they were most strict and punctilious in carrying out

all the ceremonies and rubrics prescribed by the law, they did not hesitate at the same time to violate its most essential enactments. Their acts of humility were performed in a proud and haughty spirit. Their frequent fasts were accompanied by much self-indulgence, their ostentatious almsgiving, by deeds of rapine and injustice, and even their charitable donations, by disdain and contempt of other men, whom they looked down upon and openly despised. "I am not as the rest of men," exclaimed the Pharisee in the temple—a true type of his brethren. Now, such a disposition is diametrically opposed to the teaching of Jesus Christ, who reminds us that: "God is a spirit, and they that adore Him, must adore Him in spirit and in truth." (John iv. 24.) So far from external observances satisfying for the interior worship and the true adoration of the heart; the exterior ceremonies are prescribed solely in order to arouse and to develop these interior dispositions.

Purity of intention and a right disposition of mind are related to the external duties of religion, as the soul is related to the body. If once the spirit of piety and love be removed from the external cult of religion, what remains will be no better than a dead body, hastening to corruption. Now, my dear brethren, it is true that we rightly condemn the attitude of the Pharisees, but while condemning it, may we not ask if we ourselves are wholly free from fault? How many Christians there are who assist at Mass and observe the fasts of the Church, and who are regular in the external discharge of their duties, but who make no effort to reform their inward conduct, to check their evil inclinations, to govern their critical and censorious thoughts and to repress their hidden passions? How many seek to gain a certain reputation for piety by assiduous attendance at the public functions of the Church, who are found, nevertheless, to be, in their private life, vain, sensual, quarrelsome, and exacting in their intercourse with their fellows? These often esteem any little irregularity in their external devo-

tions as a grave matter, yet leave their real serious faults wholly uncorrected, just as though piety might exist without true virtue.

The cause of this blameworthy conduct is not difficult to find. It is because these outward practices of devotion are far easier than the practice of genuine interior virtue, and because to assist at sermons or benedictions and the like, cost us much less than a solid determination to uproot our interior faults and to amend our evil ways. The only really painful duty is to fight against our corrupt nature, and to overcome our sensuality and pride. This is so essential, that if we think fidelity in external observations will save or sanctify us, while neglecting the reformation of the heart and the conscience, we shall find ourselves much mistaken. We should *begin* by purifying our intention and fixing our affections on God, and then the discharge of all our external duties will follow, as a matter of course.

While rejecting the false maxims of the Pharisees, we must, of course, guard against falling into the opposite extreme. If it is an abuse to make religion consist wholly or chiefly in exterior practices, it is no less an abuse to discountenance them altogether. A religion purely spiritual and without any external rites and ceremonies is above our nature as now constituted. How many are there, we would like to know, who can sustain their spiritual life by mere abstract contemplation? We know of none. Quite the contrary. We need many external helps: and even the simplest may be of use. The ringing of the Cathedral bells; the swelling of the organ; the voice of the choristers; the gorgeous vestments of the officiating clergy; the brilliance of lamps and candles, and the sweet fragrance of the swinging censer, all these external and material things help to lift up our thoughts and to enable us to realize the nearness of the invisible world, and the majesty of Him whom we strive to honor and to reverence by such outward and earthly symbols. Even the pose of the body will exercise an

influence over the mind. To bow low, to kneel, to prostrate on the ground are most natural to one conscious of sin, and whose heart is broken with sorrow. The fact is that man is a composite being, made up of body as well as of soul, and it is natural to him to express externally the secret thoughts burning within his soul. As a lover will *show* in a thousand different ways the love that is filling his heart, so the soul enamoured of God will seek to express his profound devotion by a variety of external rites and ceremonies which keep alive devotion, which reanimate piety, and which help to inspire us with holy thoughts and aspirations.

Thus while we must seek to serve and honor God both internally and externally, *i. e.*, with our body as well as with our soul, we must ever bear in mind that the internal homage is not only immeasurably the more important, but that without it no purely external homage can be of any avail whatever.

Now let us pass to the second point. Not only did the Pharisees attach the greatest importance to external observances and little if any to the internal dispositions, but they made true religion to consist in the most scrupulous carrying out of the minute and trivial directions of the law, while they disregarded the gravest precepts of Almighty God. We can find no excuse for them, because while practising a multitude of petty and meaningless observations, they indulged in the most abominable vices, none of which could be practised in good faith. Hence we can have no compassion for them.

But there are a certain class of Christians living at the present day who seem to imitate this defect of the Pharisees. Christians who are perhaps more deserving of commiseration than of severe reproof. We refer to those misguided persons who are honestly seeking sanctity, but who fail to understand where it is to be found.

Instead of making a more generous use of the great fundamental means of sanctification, such as earnest

prayer, regular meditation, a steadfast mortification of the senses, and devout assistance at Mass and a frequent reception of the Sacraments, they prefer to occupy themselves with all kinds of pious observances and usages, which can never supply their place. Such persons attach themselves, not to the essentials, but to the mere accidentals of religion. They are much more concerned with their medals and their scapulars, their *Agnus Deis* and holy pictures, their pilgrimages to sacred shrines and the newest fashion in devotion than they are about the genuineness of their contrition or to the ardour of their love. Such persons are most pious and really desire to become perfect, but they fall under the subtle influence of the devil, who seeks and too frequently succeeds in misleading them. He knows that they are anxious to advance, and that they are much too good to listen to any open suggestion of deliberate grievous sin, so he tries to lead them astray by false lights. He feigns to approve of piety, but persuades them to abandon the safe and solid paths of virtue and to enter upon new ways. He suggests means of perfection not real but only apparent, which their impetuous zeal induces them at once to adopt, and with the greatest enthusiasm. When they feel the charm of some new-fangled form of devotion, he persuades them to multiply it to excess. Every day some new scheme is taken up. The soul struggles under the weight of a multitude of pious practices, more specious than solid, and accepts the obligations and the rules of a dozen different confraternities, sodalities, and leagues, which it finds are practically quite impossible to keep. This too often leads to scruples and a loss of interior peace. In addition to this the effort to satisfy all these self-imposed obligations causes these persons to omit or to postpone the essential duties of their state of life, and to sacrifice the fundamental means of grace in order to satisfy the claims of works of mere supererogation.

Further, such souls are in great danger of falling into the sin of pride. Dissatisfied with the ordinary

way of salvation, they seek to cut out a path for themselves. They soon begin to look down upon those who are following the ordinary safe way, and regard themselves as standing on a higher level, imagining that they are the special favorites of Heaven. Like the Pharisees, they too are "not like the rest of men."

Then are we, it may be asked, to discard all works of supererogation, and confine ourselves exclusively to what is commanded by the strict letter of the law of God? Certainly not. All excess is to be reprobated; and it is as bad to do too little as too much. It is quite contrary to the spirit of the Gospel to limit oneself to the strict law, and to be afraid of doing or undertaking anything over and above. We must remember that the Church has its commands and it has also its counsels of perfection: and it is exceedingly difficult to keep the commandments in all their integrity, unless we make some effort also to follow the counsels. These works of supererogation do not constitute perfection, but still they are useful, and to some extent even necessary. They are to holiness what the bark of a tree is to the tree itself. They protect it; they defend it; they enable the life-giving sap to circulate throughout it. Though the bark is not the very life and substance of the tree, but only a very insignificant part, yet, if the bark be removed from the stem, we shall find that immediately the tree will dry up and wither away and die. The same may be said of our personal sanctity, if we deprive ourselves of all help from every form of private devotion. The danger of these devotions is not in their use, but in their abuse and in their excess. In all such matters we should be guided and controlled by a prudent director, and then we cannot go far wrong.

The third great vice of the Pharisees condemned by our Blessed Lord was their hypocrisy. Their great ambition was not in the least to *be* good, but only to *appear* so. They sought not true merit before God, but a high reputation among the people. They labored and toiled most assidously to secure praise and

esteem, yet they did nothing really which could entitle them to either. Further, they sought by ostentatious acts of religion to cover up the vices in which they secretly indulged. These foolish imposters might succeed in deceiving men, but could they hope to deceive God? If they really believed in God, how could they expect to impose upon Him: and if they did not believe in Him, why take so much trouble to leave a false impression? Let us, my brethren, detest all hypocrisy, especially in religion. Not only does the hypocrit utterly fail to deceive the all-seeing eye of God, but he fails for any length of time to deceive even the world. That world, which is ever ready to suspect hypocrisy, even where it has no existence, is wonderfully acute to detect it under any disguise it may assume.

But does this mean that it is necessary to make a public profession of one's faults? And that it is wrong to allow our good actions to be seen? Beware of admitting such an erroneous conclusion. Let us make a distinction between the Just and the Sinner. The sinner must behave himself with propriety and decorum; and the just must give edification; and there is no hypocrisy either in the propriety of the first, or in the edification of the second.

It would be a strange doctrine to advance that because one is a sinner, one is under an obligation of giving scandal. It would be the height of absurdity to maintain that so soon as one has become a criminal, one is bound to add still further to one's crime by flaunting it before the world and proclaiming one's vice. There is a vast difference between maintaining silence concerning our faults and simulating virtues, which we know we do not possess — between allowing men to credit us with performing our ordinary duties, and making a parade of performing magnanimous actions, to which we are in no way bound. The scrupulous efforts at concealment, made by the wicked, is an homage which vice pays to virtue; but virtue has no reason to adopt the tactics of vice. If

one fails to carry out one's obligations, one does wrong, but if one publishes the fact, one does but add to one's guilt by seeming to boast of one's evil deeds and by scandalizing one's neighbors. O! You, who are leading evil lives, if you have no pity on your own souls, have pity at least on the souls of others. If your weakness causes you to yield to temptation have some regard at least for the weakness of your brethren and lead them not astray. If you have become the slave of Satan, do not attract others to a like misery by proclaiming the fact. If you have lost that horror for sin, which would keep you from committing it, retain at all events sufficient shame to restrain you from boasting of your wickedness.

Now the question arises, how are we, on the one hand, to avoid the reproaches of Jesus Christ, who condemned the Pharisees for "doing all their works, in order to be seen by men" (Matt. xxiii. 5), and yet on the other hand to carry out the command He gave to His own disciples "so to let their light shine before men, that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father who is in Heaven"? (Matt. v. 16.) How are we to explain this seeming contradiction? We reply that there is a great difference between hypocrisy and edification. The Pharisees desired to be seen of men, in order to win their good opinion and to secure their praise and the first places. The really virtuous desire to be seen of men as our Lord Himself observes "that men may glorify God," and bless His holy name. This desire that others should witness their good deeds arises from pride, in the first case, and from charity in the second case. The first seeks his own advantage, the second the good of his neighbor. The one is solicitous about his own glory, the other is solicitous about the glory of God.

Hence, my brethren, whenever you feel drawn to perform any great public act of virtue, pause to consider the motive actuating you: is it that you may be thought more of by men, or is it that men may be incited by your example to think more of God and to

render Him greater homage and praise? Though this examination is important it is not always easy: since we may readily delude ourselves. The devil deals differently with different souls. He will persuade those who are vain to commit sin* and indulge their self-love under the pretext of edifying their neighbor. On the other hand, he will hinder timid souls from carrying out their most generous resolutions by persuading them that they are merely fostering pride. We must rise above all such satanic suggestions, which is not so difficult, for one cannot be justly accused of acting through vanity, when one has no desire to do so. We must firmly resolve in the first place not to perform our virtuous actions in order to please men; and in the second place, not to omit them for fear of pleasing them. I will conclude, as I began, by exhorting you to take warning from the example of the Pharisees, and to rise above their sordid aims, remembering that "Unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

* By doing what is in itself good, from an evil motive.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Penance

Text:—"Our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin may be destroyed to the end, that we may serve sin no longer."—(*From the Epistle just read.*)

PENANCE let us bear in mind, formed no part of God's original plan. It is one of the consequences of sin; a penalty we have brought upon ourselves. God destined man for happiness. His will was that man should live in a state of sweet content, unoppressed by pain and sorrow. God created him innocent and joyous; surrounded him with all that could administer to his wants and promote his well-being. And, had man only remained faithful and obedient he would have known nothing of anguish, or shame. Quite the contrary! His life would have been one of unclouded pleasure and delight in this world, only to be succeeded by a state of eternal and supernatural pleasure and delight in the next.

But, alas, "man, when he was in honor, did not understand," as King David reminds us in Psalm xlviii. No! He failed to realize his privileges, and, so far from following his conscience and submitting to the commands of God, he chose to listen to the deceiver, and, at his instigation, rebelled against his Sovereign and spurned his supreme Lord and Master.

The deadly poison of mortal sin, once introduced into the system, began to produce its natural effects. It caused disorder both within and without. The soul and the body, instead of living and acting in unison, became, as it were, torn asunder by conflicting interests. Each struggled for the mastery. Originally the body, together with all its senses and its appetites, was in complete subjection to the soul, so that the whole person was at peace. There was harmony because

the soul ruled. This harmony no longer obtains. Now the body is ever striving to gain the upper hand, and to usurp the authority of the soul. It seeks sensual indulgences, it strives after worldly and perishable goods, it demands all kinds of corporal satisfactions. The soul is obliged to struggle and fight for its life, and to put forth all its strength so as not to be dragged down into the mire and filth of sin. "Man's life upon earth is a warfare," as the Holy Spirit reminds us. And experience proves that the battle is a hard and a stubborn one, and that in many ways we are always failing and yielding. Scarcely a day goes by but we give way, in some measure, to the solicitations of our corrupt nature. Indeed, all our natural tendencies are toward sloth, toward neglect of duty, toward neglect of prayer, and toward love of the world, rather than toward love of God.

It will be well for us to consider the years of our life that have already rolled by, and the manner in which we have misused and misspent them. How seldom we have acted perfectly, how often imperfectly; how seldom our intentions have been really upright and disinterested, how often they have been tainted and unworthy. And, as for our daily negligences, omissions, and injustices, who shall reckon them?

Yet observe, just as day is added to day, so offense is added to offense, until they surpass all calculation. And each slight offense, however slight; and each venial fault, however venial, calls for its own separate and definite punishment. How terrifying to contemplate this ever-growing list of sins, with its corresponding growing list of punishments. As some foolish spendthrift is at last oppressed by his ever-increasing weight of debt, so are we courting a similar fate by our negligence and indiscretion. Sins accumulate. Punishments accumulate. Yet we pay no heed.

The fact is, time hurries us on, so that our childhood, our boyhood, and our adolescence are soon lost to mind, and we rest in sweet oblivion of the sins that

have stained and besmirched our souls during those forgotten years. Nevertheless they are all, without exception, noted down by the recording angel, and will, one day, be brought up against us. Yes, the whole history of our life, with all its selfishness, its infidelities, its shortcomings, its disorderly acts, and its reprehensible thoughts, and perverse and unruly desires, is written down, we might even say, *engraved* on the mind of God, so that, when we are summoned to the Judgment, there may be laid upon us the punishment of ten thousand sins.

The *guilt* of these sins, if we have been truly contrite, will have been forgiven us, but, unless we shall have already satisfied for them, the punishment remains. Yes! Even though Heaven be our ultimate home and dwelling, yet we shall not actually enter into possession of its joys and privileges till we have fully satisfied the claims of God's justice, and atoned for every sin. We shall be kept in bondage till we have wiped out every fraction of our debt. "Amen, amen, I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from hence till thou hast paid the last farthing."

The canonized saints seemed, to the eyes of men, to be without sin. Yet before God even they were not pure. We may, indeed, call them holy and just, but the Scripture reminds us that even "a just man shall fall seven times." (Proverbs xxiv. 16.) But if even the saints often fell, their falls were not only far less serious than ours, but they were continually settling their accounts, and wiping out their debts, by their constant mortifications and severe penances. With them *every* day was a day of self denial. But we? What are we doing? What efforts are we making to cancel our debts and to satisfy God's anger; we, whose sins are so much more numerous and so much more serious and deliberate than the slight faults and frailties of the great servants of God?

Alas! We do little if anything, and scarcely seem to realize the gravity of the situation. It is for this very reason that the Church, at various seasons, calls

to our minds a duty which we are all too willing to forget, and urges us to bow our heads in prayer, and to mortify our bodies by fasts and abstinence.

The law of penance is a divine law, and none can escape it. Since all are included under sin, so all are included under the law of penance. There are, no doubt, some too delicate or too sick to undertake the precise form of penance enjoined by the Church. These may, of course, apply for a dispensation. But even when this has been granted, it in no way releases them from the general obligation, which rests upon every sinner, of doing penance for his offenses.

Should any man wish to exempt himself from all penance, let him first prove himself exempt from all sin. When such a blameless soul, such an astounding saint arises in our midst, it will be time enough to consider his case. As to ourselves, we have learned little of Catholic truth if we do not yet know that we must take up the Cross if we are to be true followers of the Crucified. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." (Matt. xvi. 24.)

What, it may be asked, is the use of penance? What purpose does it serve? My reply is, that penance atones for sin (through the merits of Jesus Christ), and appeases God's anger. That would suffice, even if that were all. But it does yet more. It imparts a strength and vigor to the soul, which goes far to ensure its victory over its enemies. It braces up the entire man and instills habits of virtue, which are of incalculable service in our contests with the devil, the world and the flesh.

However, these are mere statements. We shall perhaps better realize their truth if we first consider carefully what sin really is, and then the security that a mortified life affords us against its assaults.

Sin! Sin, my dear brethren, is the only enemy we really have to fear. To convince ourselves of that, all we need do is to ask ourselves the following questions: What is that which alone can blast our whole career?

Rob us of God? Deprive us of Heaven? And fling us headlong into the bottomless pit? What is it that which alone has the power to chain us down, amid the quenchless flames of hell, forever and ever, as long as God is God? There is literally but one thing, and that is sin. Yes. No other enemy can work us such evil. Sin, and only sin, possesses this awful power. Sin can do it. Sin has done it. Sin is doing it every day. Sin, in short, is the very root and source of all our misery, and of all our misfortune.

But what is sin? What is its nature? From what hellish soil does it spring? Of what diabolical parent is sin born? Ah! It springs from the spirit of self-love. It is born of self-indulgence, it can flourish in no other soil. And what is its connection with penance? Well! it is the exact contrary. It is its antagonist, its most inveterate enemy. One is, in short, the antipodes of the other.

What does an act of sin turn out to be, when we come to analyze it? An act of sin is an act of self-indulgence. And what is an act of penance? An act of penance is an act, not of self-indulgence, but precisely the contrary, *viz.*, an act of self-oppression, an act of self-conquest. When a man sins, he allows inclinations to conquer him. When he does penance, he conquers inclination. When we sin our enemy throws us under his feet, and, placing his heel upon our head, crushes us. When, on the contrary, we do penance, it is we who throw our enemy under our feet, and instead of his placing his heel upon us, we place our heel upon him and crush him, leaving him utterly vanquished.

Hence, to practice penance, to cultivate the virtue of mortification, is to dispose ourselves in the most direct way for continual victories. We can not help being tempted. No. Temptation is a necessary condition of our present state. But we can and ought to prevent ourselves being overcome, and to take the means of always scoring a success. Now, if we possess the penitential spirit, and lead lives of mortifica-

tion, and acquire a well founded habit of self-denial, then our victory is assured.

We fall, often grievously, because we will not dispose ourselves for the conflict by accustoming ourselves to self-denial in lawful things. In this respect how far wiser are the children of this world than the children of light. A soldier of an earthly king does not expose himself to the enemy, in the open field, until after he has been carefully drilled and exercised. An athlete will not enter the lists, nor pit his strength against another, until after he has acquired strength and dexterity by previous practise. In fact, no man, be he a wrestler, or a boxer or swordsman, or a runner or swimmer, attempts to exhibit his prowess in a public contest, save after an extended period of preparation. He is quite well aware that he can never hope to succeed, or to carry off the prize, without previous exercise and regular training.

And, dearly beloved brethren, if this be deemed essential in ordinary encounters, where nothing of serious importance is at stake, how immeasurably more important it must be where the consequences of success or failure are so momentous and far reaching. For the sake of a very dubious gain worldlings deny themselves and put themselves to endless trouble and pain, while we can hardly be induced to do anything that involves suffering or inconvenience, even to secure eternal life, and the inheritance of the saints. Yet, to our shame be it said, they are contending only for an earthly crown, while we for a heavenly and everlasting one.

Compare two men of similar age and position, but differing in their spiritual training, and mark how differently each is affected by temptation. The one, let us suppose, has always followed his inclination and indulged his own sweet will. His one ruling idea has always been to amuse and enjoy himself. He has, in short, gone on the plan of gratifying himself to the full, in all that is not sin. Suddenly, when he least anticipates anything of the kind, he is brought face to

face with some severe temptation. The devil invites him to enjoy some forbidden pleasure, and sets his whole heart ablaze with the fire of some sinful passion. The unhappy man knows it is contrary to the law of God. He is conscious that Heaven and hell are quivering in the balance. True. But he has no experience in the art of self-denial. He has never refused himself anything. On the other hand, the pleasure is so attractive; the opportunity close at hand; and having had no previous practise in the art of wrestling with an adversary, how can he begin now? "Habit," it has been said, "is a second nature"; strong, imperious, and almost irresistible. He has, indeed, formed a habit, but it is a bad habit; yes, a habit of self-indulgence. How is he to break through it at this moment? How escape from its iron thraldom? Such is his plight. Not only is the devil fighting against him, and the world and the flesh, but what is worst of all, his own nature has conspired with these enemies to encompass his ruin—that nature which has been trained for years to yield to the solicitations of pleasure on every occasion, and never to forego any opportunity of self-indulgence. Oh, who will describe the dangers of such a position? What hopes are there of his ultimate victory? Alas! We can discover but the faintest.

Very different is the position of the man who has passed through the school of voluntary suffering, and who has diligently studied the art of self-conquest. Yea, who, by the grace of God, has perhaps never let a day go by without performing some act of abnegation. Such a one is armed and ready for the fray. He has his inclinations well under control. He has denied and thwarted them so often in lawful things, that he feels no difficulty now in denying and thwarting them in things that are unlawful and pernicious. If his passions are not actually dead they are tamed, and as subject to his direction as a horse that has felt the curb, and has been thoroughly broken in. Pleasures may be set before him in the most seductive

forms. Everything may seem to invite him to indulge his wish, but fortunately he is no novice in the art of self-denial. He has acquired such a mastery, that the storm passes but does him no harm. While others sink, like weak reeds, before its blast, he, like some mighty rock, weathers the fiercest tempest, draws good out of evil, and even wins an everlasting crown. Hence the poet sings:

> Sow an act, reap a habit;
> Sow a habit, reap a character;
> Sow a character, reap a destiny.

But even admitting the need of penance, why, it may be asked, does the Church set aside the forty days of Lent, all the Fridays of the year, the Ember days and other times especially for the purpose?

The reason, dear brethren, is not far to seek. The Church well knows our weakness and sluggishness in the service of God, and how unwilling we are at all times to forego any pleasure, or to put ourselves out in the smallest way. She is perfectly well aware that, if left to ourselves, we would be always postponing the evil day, and that few, if any of us, would undertake any penance whatsoever. We would be forever discovering or inventing some excuse for dispensing ourselves. Life would go by and nothing would be done. To meet this difficulty she selects forty days of Lent, etc., etc., during which she commands us to consider more seriously than at other times the needs of our soul, and to do penance for our sins. The number forty is selected, rather than any other, because Jesus Christ, our divine model and example, chose to fast for that number of the days and nights in the desert before beginning His public life. And as He, the infinite Holy, had no faults of His own to expiate, nor any need of learning the art of self-conquest, His chief motive was clearly to leave us an example, that we might follow in His footsteps.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Text:—"Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit."—(*From the Gospel of the day.*)

IN to-day's Gospel, our Divine Lord speaks to us of two classes of men, the good, who are anxious to please Him and to live lives of virtue, and the bad, who neglect their duty to God, in order to please themselves and to indulge their own passions. The first class He compares to a good tree, which produces good fruit, and the second to a bad tree, which produces bad fruit.

Now, it should be our ambition to belong to the first class, and to do all we can, during life, to bring forth good fruit. But how are we to achieve such a desirable result? We must not sit idle, as if these fruits would grow and come to maturity of themselves. No: we must imitate the energetic agriculturist, and labor assiduously to improve the quality and to increase the quantity of the fruit. Consider the manner in which an intelligent husbandman strives to improve his trees. See how he cuts off the dead branches, how he prunes those that are sterile, and how he binds up the wounds in the trunk. See how he guards his fruit from preying birds, and from the ravages of insects, and from other pests.

If an ordinary agriculturist shows so much zeal in cultivating his earthly garden, how much greater interest we should feel in cultivating the garden of our soul. We should cut off from our hearts every criminal affection; we should repress every idle amusement that interferes with the proper discharge of our duties; we should seek to cure the wounds of our soul by recourse to the sacred tribunal of penance; and guard the treasure of our innocence from all the attacks of our implacable enemies, the devil, the world

and the flesh. The careful cultivation of our soul should be our chief concern during the whole course of our earthly life. Should we neglect this duty, our soul will speedily deteriorate and lose its virtue, and resemble a neglected tree which, when once abandoned to itself, produces nothing but wood and leaves, and immature, half-developed and sour fruit.

Our Lord warns us that "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire." Consider the terrible character of this punishment, and how it falls not merely upon the tree that brings forth evil fruits, but even upon that which brings not forth good fruits. In these words our Lord would teach us that in order that we should save our souls it is necessary not only to refrain from evil, but also to do good. To escape the fires of hell, we must actually bring forth fruit, and *good* fruit. Many lukewarm Christians flatter themselves that all is well, because they are not conscious of any specific vice or evil habit. They think their salvation is secure because they do not indulge in positive sin. "What evil have I done?" they ask. What crime can you lay to my charge?" Jesus Christ declares that such persons will be condemned, not for the evil they have done, but for the good they have left undone.

When God places us in this world, He gives us a religion to practise, and laws to keep, and certain duties to fulfil. These are all "Talents" with which we have to trade. If we bury our Talents in a napkin, and refuse to turn them to account, and if we refuse to exert ourselves, we shall be condemned on the great accounting day, and cast into the exterior darkness together with those who have been guilty of positive sin. To abstain from actual sin is not the whole law of God: it is but the half of it. "*Declina a male, et fac bonum,*" says holy David, "Refrain from evil, *and* do good" (xxxvi. 27). Not only "Cease to do perversely," says Isaias, "but learn to do well" (i. 16, 17).

As it has already been said, in order that we may

receive a merciful sentence from the lips of Jesus Christ, it is essential that we should bring forth fruit, and really good fruit. Now it is the motive, beyond everything else, which gives the price to our actions. Thus, abstinence practised simply for the sake of health, or alms given solely from a certain natural sympathy, are incapable of meriting a supernatural reward. Such actions might even be sinful, for they may be performed through ostentation and pride. Nor should we find fault with this rule, that places the true merit of an action in the intention. So far from being severe it is, on the contrary, a grand illustration of God's mercy. For thus even our commonest and most indifferent actions become clothed with merit and are rendered exceedingly agreeable to God. In this manner we notice that God not only commands us to bring forth good fruit, but that He, at the same time, enables us to do so easily and in the greatest abundance, no matter what may be the general character of our life.

"Not every one that saith to me, Lord! Lord! shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in Heaven, he shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

Having commanded us to bring forth good fruit, Christ goes on to render His teaching yet more explicit by means of an example. There is certainly no more excellent duty commanded by religion than prayer: yet prayer is not everything. It is necessary, but it is not enough. And what our Lord says here of prayer, we must apply to all other practices that religion imposes or encourages. They are useful and to be highly commended, but it is an illusion to suppose that such observances can be made to replace the ordinary duties of one's state of life. Yet this is by no means an uncommon illusion. Thus, many devout persons persuade themselves that they are justified in neglecting their ordinary household and social duties in order to give themselves up to long devotional exercises. They leave their business unat-

tended to, and their children uncared for in order that they may spend their time hearing Masses, listening to spiritual conferences, reading books of devotion, and other pious works. They willingly undertake these works of supererogation. Yet they leave the special obligations of their state of life undone. They forget that if prayer and the Sacraments and spiritual exercises are necessary, it is to secure graces and help from God, to enable them to carry out their *ordinary* duties. It is in order that they may receive all the means requisite to accomplish as perfectly as possible the tasks that God's providence has alloted to them; and not to supply their place, or to be substituted instead of them.

Let us then bear well in mind that perfection consists, not in doing a great number of different things, but in doing well those few things which we are obliged to do; that it consists not in notable and grand achievements, but in the careful and faithful discharge of ordinary common place duties. God desires that all men should be perfect, yet to very few does He give the opportunity of striking and heroic achievements. It is not the exceptional opportunity of doing something great that will sanctify us; it is rather the regular and daily and perfect discharge of our ordinary and habitual actions.

Consider the Saints, those chosen souls, whom the Church puts before us for our admiration and imitation. What route have they followed that the should have reached such a height of sanctity? Was it by extraordinary exploits that strike the imagination, and that seem beyond the power of ordinary men? Quite the contrary. Indeed, the greater part of them in their great humility did their best to avoid any striking enterprise and sought to live unknown and forgotten by the world. They shunned the applause of men and strove to lie as hidden as our Blessed Lord in the home of Nazareth.

All true perfection consists in doing God's will.

Now the will of God is that each one should be perfect according to his own particular state and condition. God's will is made manifest by His laws. These laws oblige us to two things: the first concerns the duties of religion, and bind all men, such as prayer, the Sacraments, Holy Mass, and mortification, and so forth; and the second concerns the duties connected with our own particular calling and state of life, and these differ in different individuals. These two sets of duties are equally commanded by God, consequently they cannot be opposed to one another. It is not enough to obey all the commands issued by Jesus Christ. It is also necessary to perform the particular duties of our state of life. Every Christian finds himself placed in a certain position by the providence of God, and whether he be a king or laborer, he also sees certain functions that naturally appertain to his own special position, and which God expects him to fulfil. It matters not what our condition may be. Whether a man be the mightiest king, ruling over the mightiest kingdom, or whether he be the lowest and humblest of the king's subjects, such a one will make a great mistake if he supposes that he is, where he is, by mere chance, and not by the appointment of Almighty God. He will make a still greater mistake if he imagines that in fulfilling the tasks allotted to him he is merely complying with civil requirements, for he is in truth obeying the law of God, and carrving out His divine will.

In decreeing that each one should secure salvation by attending to the business of his own profession, God has so contrived at the same time that each shall actually find within his profession or trade all the means necessary. To each profession He attaches special graces which render its obligations easier. To each He also attaches certain difficulties and hardships, which serve to multiply merits. And what is yet more admirable and pleasing, in every walk of life, He causes examples of the highest virtues to spring forth, to excite our admiration, to encourage our imitation, and to confound the vain and pitiful

excuses we allege for falling short of that degree of perfection to which He calls us. Open the Holy Scriptures and we shall find saints and heroes in every possible position. The kingly throne has its David; the ministry of State has its Joseph; the army its Macabees; the Law its Samuel, and the Temple its Onias. Opulence is represented by Abraham; Poverty by Elias; adversity by Job; prosperity by Ezechias. Or consider the saints of the New Law. Where will you fail to discover models of the highest virtue? They are conspicuous everywhere. They are found among the celibate and among the married: in the deserts and in the cloisters; in town and in country. St. Paul speaks of them as existing even within the house of Nero.

When the Holy Spirit wishes to give us the portrait of a model woman, noble and valient, does He take us to the Assyrian Camp and point to Judith the conqueror of Holofernes? Does He invite us to the Palace of Assuerus and bid us look upon Esther, the liberator of Israel? No: He portrays the model woman, the woman we have to imitate, as at home, in her own house, surrounded by her family and domestics. She is occupied with her ordinary household duties, and with the care of her husband. "The heart of her husband trusteth in her. She will render him good and not evil, all the days of her life. She rises in the night and gives food to her household and victuals to her maidens. She considers a field and buys it, and with her hands she plants a vineyard. . . . She puts out her hand to strong things, and her fingers take hold of the spindle. She opens her hand to the needy, and stretches out her hand to the poor. . . . She looks well to the wants or her house, and eats not the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed, and her husband is full of her praise," etc., etc. (Proverbs, xxxi. 10, *et seq.*) Such is the example set before us by Holy Writ, and those pious but misguided persons who neglect these ordinary home duties to engage in long and unnecessary devotions,

would do well to conform more strictly to the model so beautifully drawn by the inspired writer.

Coming now to the time of Christ, let us examine the teaching of St. John the Baptist. He was sanctified while still within his mother's womb, and according to the testimony of Christ Himself, was not only a saint, but "the greatest born of woman."

His own life was so wonderful and so austere that he attracted great numbers to the banks of the Jordan, who besought him to teach them the way of salvation, saying: "What then shall we do," (Luke iii. 10.) These inquirers were of all classes. On the one hand, the rich sought to know how they were to acquire sure possession of the great Kingdom of Heaven of which he spoke. On the other hand, the Publicans and Taxgatherers asked him to prescribe for them. He was also questioned by soldiers and fighting men. What did St. John reply to these different inquirers, anxious about their souls, and fearful of the dangers so powerfully depicted by him? Did the saintly Precurser bid them abandon their calling, which was attended by so much danger? Did he insist on their taking up their abode in the desert, and following his own penitential mode of life? No! Nothing of the kind. He taught them to seek perfection in fulfilling the various tasks allotted to them, and in attending conscientiously to their proper calling. The rich were to fulfil the duties of their state, and to distribute their superfluous goods to the needy. "He that hath two coats, let him give to him who hath none, and he that hath meat, let him do in like manner." (Luke iii. 11.) To the publicans who addressed him, saying: "Master, what shall *we* do? He replied: Do nothing more than that which is appointed you" (Luke iii. 12-13), *i. e.*, do not overcharge; take only what is your due. So again, to the soldiers, he said: "Do violence to no man: neither calumniate any man: and be content with your pay." (Id. 14.) In short, St. John urged all to seek perfection in the manner appointed by God: to look upon

their ordinary daily tasks as the most acceptable offering they could make to Him; and not to take any unlawful advantage of their position.

There is no doubt but that the duties of our state of life form a part, and a most important part, of our service of God. And any practice which interferes with or hinders these duties, however holy and admirable it may be in itself, is an offense committed against God. So soon as one takes up any form of devotion, to the prejudice of one's ordinary duties, one is not really exercising virtue but vice. Such persons employ a false appearance of piety to cover a real defect; "having an appearance indeed of godliness," as St. Paul says, "but denying the power thereof." (Tim. iii. 5.)

I will conclude with a quotation from Mgr. Bonomelli, Bishop of Cremona. "Excess in *exterior* religious practices," he says, "disperses the spiritual forces in too many directions, distracts, fatigues and oppresses the spirit, and instead of elevating it and arousing all its energies, relaxes the fibres and suffocates it. Look at a tree. In order to live and be fruitful, it must be covered with young shoots and leaves by means of which it breathes and draws its sustenance. But let the shoots and leaves become too thick and luxuriant and the vital sap of the tree will be dispersed. It will not bring forth any fruit or only a few miserable unripe specimens which fall off. And very soon the tree itself begins to wither up and die from exhaustion.

"This is what happens to any one who loads himself with devotions and religious practices and lives entirely for the exterior worship—he succumbs beneath the weight of them. Look now at the skilful husbandman who remorselessly cuts away the superfluous branches from the vine and so restrains the flow of sap, thus making sure of the fruit, and at the same time providing for the life of the plant. Fewer devotions, fewer religious practices, less consumption of spiritual forces in external acts, and more vigorous

will become the spiritual life, and more fiercely will burn the inner fire of divine charity. Focus the sun's rays upon a given point and you will get fire; divert them and dispurse them and you will get but a feeble light, and scarcely any feeling of heat. Multiply your devotions and you will diminish the energies of religious feeling and weaken piety."

"What," he continues, "are all these devotions, rosaries, and novenas, benedictions and visits to images and famous sanctuaries, processions and pilgrimages, and hymns and feast days, and functions worth, unless we do our duty and lead a genuine Christian life? They are as leaves without fruit—and who cares for leaves only?

"Am I condemning these things? God forbid! They are, as I have already declared, means to excite faith and to sustain piety—but let them be used with moderation (as we use condiments *with* solid food, and not *in the place* of solid food). Do not let us imagine real virtue to consist in them, nor think that through their means we satisfy God, who considers the mind and the heart, and desires above all things that we should learn to govern our passions, resist our evil inclinations, and put solid virtue into practice." (See Bonomelli's "*Religious Worship.*")

It is of course obvious, that all forms of devotion approved of or even tolerated by the Church must be *in themselves* good and praiseworthy. But does it follow as a necessary consequence that in practice there is never anything to be corrected or reproved? No one would venture to say so. Everybody knows that even the most desirable things may easily become prejudicial if they are overdone. Work, food, repose, exercise, study and many other things are excellent and to be highly commended—yet *too* much even of such excellent things does harm, and may even prove fatal to life. In the use of devout practices, private or public, it is above all things easy to sin through *excess*. It is against this excess alone that we feel we must lift up a warning voice.

Let us then resolve to make a generous use of the great and fundamentl means of grace, such as prayer, the Sacraments, Holy Mass, penance and mortification and meditation, and let us do our utmost to fulfil the particular duties of our state of life as perfectly as we can, since in that way we shall be accomplishing the will of God, whose Providence appoints to each his allotted task.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Things of Eternity

Text:—"The children of this world are wiser, in their generation, than the children of light."—(*From the Gospel of the Sunday.*)

THE great majority of men live as though there were no other life. Their interest in the world and in things of the world is so intense and so all-engrossing, as to practically exclude all anxiety about anything beyond their present reach. Business, money-making, social duties, parties, dinners, pleasures, amusements, occupy almost the whole of their finite minds. They have no time to spare for such remote interests as are suggested by death, eternity, Heaven, judgment, and hell. "Such things," they will tell us "can wait." For the present, at all events, they have no leisure to discuss or to consider the future, and what they will call "the highly speculative problems and theories of a world beyond the grave."

As a consequence, they continue to eat and drink, to play and sleep; to labor, when they have a mind, and to rest, when they are tired, and to make merry with their friends, without fear of a judgment to come, and without any sense of responsibility.

They disport themselves, gaily and cheerfully, like thoughtless children skating over thin ice, who know not that at any moment the ice may break and they may fall in. They resemble those foolish people, who build their houses on the edge of a volcano, all unconscious of the slumbering sea of liquid fire, that lies hidden just below them, and which may rise at any moment, and without any warning (overflowing from the mouth of the crater), bury them and their entire village under red-hot *lapilli* and molten lava.

In short, they live in daily, yea, may we not say,

hourly risk of a terrible awakening, and of a fate far too appalling to be expressable in human language. Such men can scarcely be free from sin. They show no fear of God, and yet "the fear of the Lord" is the very first condition of true wisdom, and the initial condition for a life of virtue, so that a sudden summons to judgment would mean, *to them,* a sentence too terrible to contemplate.

The inspired writer draws a terrific picture of the situation of a thoughtless and worldly-minded man, suddenly called to give an account of his "stewardship," when he is thinking of quite other matters. Listen to the words of the Holy Ghost, as uttered by the lips of the holy Job. After describing how the wicked often thrive in this world, and how they are even blessed with children and friends, he continues: "Their little ones go out like a flock, and their children dance and play. They take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ; they spend their days in wealth, and, in a moment they go down to hell." In spite of all their worldly renown and present high estate, "they shall be as chaff before the face of the wind, and as ashes which the whirlwind scattereth." (Job xxi. 10, 18.)

In to-day's Gospel, my dear brethren, the Chruch mercifully reminds us that we are, in reality, but the stewards and the servants of God, who have received a certain work do to, and who will shortly be called to render an account of it.

"There was a certain rich man, who had a steward." The "rich man," here spoken of, is no other than Jesus Christ. Who, indeed, is so rich and powerful as He? The "steward" is the soul of man. I, dear brethren, and you are His stewards. And the rich Man, our Lord, calls His steward to His presence, and says to him: "Give an account of thy stewardship, for now thou canst be steward no longer."

How difficult it is, my dear brethren, to realize things as they really are. How much more difficult still, when we are dealing with things intangible and

spiritual! And, still more if we seldom or never make any serious effort to picture them to ourselves.

This is especially true of such an event as that which the Church calls to our minds to-day, *viz.*, the Judgment.

You who are now seated before me are in every truth the stewards of Almighty God. Each one of you has not only been created by Him and placed in this world, but each of you has a special task to do and particular duties to fulfil. Though you may go about your various avocations in a mechanical and perfunctory way, and think little of remote consequences, yet the stern fact is that you are (whether you advert to it or not) constantly influencing and affecting your future life. Each day, and each hour of each day, you are adding to your punishments or to your rewards, increasing your merits or demerits, and helping to render your eternity either more entrancingly pleasurable, or more hopelessly wretched.

Our Lord warns us, that our future will be just what we make it. "As a man sows, so shall he reap." That is the law. If we sow good deeds, we shall reap a rich and glorious harvest; but if we are careless and indifferent, and take no trouble to avoid sin, and to exercise virtue, we cannot expect to reap anything but trouble and disaster. The Apostle tells us that: "God will render to every man, *according to his works.*" (Rom. xi. 6.) So again, in another place, St. Paul declares that: "We must all be manifested before the Judgment Seat of Christ, that every one may receive the proper things of the body, *according as he hath done,* whether it be good or evil." (2 Cor. v. 10.)

By these and many other texts, we are gravely warned that our responsibility is exceedingly great. The practical and all-important question we have to put to ourselves is: Do we realize the situation? Are we fully and vividly conscious of our obligations, and of the strict account we shall one day have to render? Do we perform each act, and brace ourselves up for each duty, as if we knew that we are to be examined,

and, as it were, cross-questioned as to the spirit, and manner and intention with which it was performed? Yea, I will go further and ask, if we ever advert to the strange, but most undoubted fact, that God is actually watching and witnessing each and every deed done, every prayer uttered, every tempation resisted, every sinful passion indulged, every idle word spoken. Do we, in spirit, actually see God standing over us, and registering in His Divine Mind, all our actions, as the days and the weeks go by? When, for instance, we are not quite "straight" in our business trasactions, not altogether sober or temperate, or when we take a mean advantage of another, or are proud, or selfish, or ill-natured or morose; do we remember that the whole of such conduct is as ineffaceably stamped on the mind of God, as if it had been cut in the solid rock? And that it will all come up before us at the day of Judgment, to be dealt with and weighed, in the strict "Balance of the Sanctuary?"

Our danger is that we easily forget these alarming truths, so the Church, in her solicitude, insists upon setting them before us from time to time; for alas! alas! we shall not escape them by foolishly striving to efface all recollections of them from our minds.

Let us, in thought, follow a man as he passes before the "Great White Throne," on which is seated the dread Judge of the living and the dead.

We have often stood by the bedside of the dying. We have, perhaps, watched someone near and dear to us, seized by some fatal disease, and laid upon a bed of suffering. With sorrowful hearts, and tear-stained eyes, we have seen the light fade away from the eyes, and the glow of health vanish from the cheek, and the limbs grow stiff and cold, and then we have realized that the mysterious gates of Eternity have been flung open, and that he has entered into "the Great Beyond." We may follow him to the very brink of Eternity, we may gather around him up to the very last breath, but then we must let him pass, alone, and unaccompanied, before the awful presence of God.

He may have been rich, and influential, and of high renown; but now he has gone where riches are rather a hindrance than an aid, where the most powerful friends cannot rescue, and where even the very grandest titles and dignities are no passport to eternal life.

O! What a meeting that will be! For the first time in his life he gazes on the face of God. How will he stand the scrutiny of His searching glance? That, my brethren, will depend upon the state of his soul. If he be in sin, then the mere look of anger upon the Divine Countenance, would be enough to kill him, were he not immortal.

Have you ever considered the fear and terror of a culprit standing before even a mere earthly judge? When a murderer has been caught red-handed, and brought before the magistrate, his whole courage fails. Though it is but a human judge, a man like himself, and though the very worst penalty he can inflict is the shortening of a life, which must, *in any case*, terminate in a few years, yet the unhappy criminal trembles with terror. At the sight of this human official standing up, and solemnly pronouncing the sentence of death, how often even the most hardened offender has been known to faint away and to fall back trembling into the hands of his jailers.

If such be the condition of one in presence of a mere man, invested with a brief authority, who shall describe the condition of a sinner, in the presence of the Infinite and Omnipotent God, "Who holds in His hands, the keys both of life and of death." The Holy Scripture represents such a sinner as a prey to the most awful anguish, and as quite beside himself with fear. His one desire is to fly from the face of an angry God. To hide himself anywhere, so long as he may escape His petrifying look. He will call upon the mountains to fall upon him and bury him beneath their piled-up rocks; He will implore the sea to swallow him up, or the earth to open and afford him a refuge from the dreadful doom that threatens him. But, it will be all in vain, for there is none to deliver,

none to dispute the irresistible power of the Infinie Judge. Too late, too late? Ah! Yes, why did he not think of all this before? Why did he not spend in serious thought some of those many hours passed in sin or worldly pleasure or, at least, in idleness and dissipation? Why did he put off all amendment, all conversion till it was too late?

Why are men so indifferent, so lukewarm, so remiss in the service of God? If love is not strong enough to keep them sober and pure and honest and innocent, how comes it that at least fear does not restrain them and deter them from mortal sin? Why? Why, my brethren? The answer is clear. It comes to us from the mouth of the supreme Judge Himself. Then listen, and take heed: "With desolation is the whole world made desolate, because there is *no man who considers* in his heart." (Jer. xii. 11.) Here God lets us into the secret cause of all our disaster: we do not think. Then let us make a few reflections this morning at all events, on the subject before us.

A judgment awaits us. Who is the Judge? In the *first* place, He is infinitely wise. He knows everything. He reads all our thoughts, as in a book. Nothing escapes His all penetrating gaze. Not only our deeds, words, thoughts, omissions, and ambitions are engraven on His memory, but the secret motives from which they sprung, and the purpose and intention that accompanied them, and every circumstance that led up to them, or that aggravated their guilt, or that added to their malice. He actually sees our life as though it were a map stretched out before Him, with every day, hour, and minute from birth to death clearly marked upon it, as well as the acts and words and thoughts that went to fill up those various periods of our earthly career. We can hide nothing from Him. We can explain nothing away. It is impossible to deceive or cajole Him, as we may sometimes an earthly judge. For "His eyes are far brighter than the sun, beholding round about, all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep, and looking into the

hearts of men, into the most hidden parts." (Eccl. xxiii. 28.)

In the *second* place, He is infinitely good, infinitely holy. Consequently, He hates sin with an infinite intensity, and cannot suffer it in His sacred presence. He is as opposed to sin as light is opposed to darkness. However feeble a light may be, it nevertheless struggles with the darkness and seeks to cast it off. But where the source of light is powerful, it will drive the darkness before it with all the impetuosity of its nature. Consider the sun. Though deepest night may be hanging as a shroud over all the earth, yet, the sun has but to show the crest of its fiery orb above the horizon, and instantly, the shadows flee, and the darkness is hurled back beyond the uttermost parts of the world. Now, as darkness cannot stand in presence of the sun; so sin cannot stand in presence of the dazzling purity and exquisite splendor of the Divine Sanctity. God loathes sin; He detests it beyond all else; He cannot suffer it; He will have nothing to do with it; He knows of no other evil. He acknowledges no other evil but that alone. Sin defiles all it touches, it corrupts all that it breathes upon, it brings ruin and desolation wherever it falls. Yes! It entered the heart of an Apostle and it made a deicide of him; it penetrated into the hearts of the angels and it transformed them into demons. We have no notion of the gravity and the hideousness of sin. We scarcely suspect it. If we did, sin would become for us a practical impossibility. But God knows. And woe to us if we enter before Him in judgment with a mortal sin lurking in our heart. For God is not only infinitely wise, but infinitely holy. The very source of all sanctity.

In the *third* place, He is infinitely powerful. "It is a fearful thing," says the inspired writer, "to fall into the hands of the living God." (Heb. x. 31.) "Terrible," indeed, if we are in a state of sin. For then, nothing will be able to snatch us out of His power. He will hold us, as it were, in the hollow of His palm, as a fowler will hold a tiny bird which he has en-

trapped. We may flutter and struggle, but it will be all in vain. He will not only pronounce sentence, but He will see that it is carried out. And, if we have not obeyed nor recognized His authority *before,* we shall find ourselves obliged both to recognize it, and to experience it, when once we have passed into the mysterious beyond, and have heard the irrevocable sentence, that fixes our doom, for ever more. What will be our feelings at that dread moment, if we have abandoned ourselves to our passions, during life, and thought only of enjoying ourselves, and of driving a thriving trade, and of heaping together wealth and possessions, instead of attending to our chief and only really important business, namely the salvation of our soul? May God, in His infinite mercy, deliver us from so appalling an experience.

In the *fourth* place, the Judge is infinitely just. He will punish sin as it deserves. There will be no favoritism, no partiality, nothing but strict justice. Sighs and tears will then be wholly unavailing. The time of repentance is over. The period, in which sorrow and heartfelt weeping could touch the heart of God is forever passed. "Behold, *now* is the acceptable time, *now* is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. vi. 2.) Yes, *now* we may do much, *then* we can do nothing. It will be all too late. While life lasts, we can turn over a new leaf, and by a sincere repentance, wash out past offences, and seek a reconciliation with God, but this cannot be deferred to the next life. What says the Holy Scripture? "Be at agreement with thy adversary *betimes, whilst thou art in the way* with Him." That is to say, in this world. Why? Listen: "Lest perhaps He delivereth thee to the Judge, and thou be cast into prison, to the eternal prison of hell." (Matt. v. 25.)

How sad it is to witness the folly of so many Christians, who refuse to ponder over these tremendous truths, and who insist upon continuing in their course of sin and of disobedience to God's most holy law. They are preparing for themselves a ghastly future,

almost too terrifying to contemplate. Do you, at least, my beloved brethren, act with greater wisdom and forethought. Turn your thoughts inward. Examine your own hearts, and see if all is well with you, and in order. Carefully consider your past conduct and behavior, and if there be anything to correct or amend, set to work at once, and pause not till you have set everything to rights, and purified your hearts from all defilement.

You ask—Why this hurry? Why so great haste? I will answer. Not only because we should not wish to remain for one single instant the enemy of God, and not only because we should yearn to remove from our souls the disgusting filth and loathsome ordure of sin. But more especially because we know not the day nor the hour when we shall be called before the angry face of God, to receive sentence of eternal condemnation. The warning comes to us directly from the mouth of God Himself. "Watch and pray," He says, "for you know not the day nor the hour when your Lord Will come." (Matt. xxiv. 42.) And, if we should chance to be in sin at that moment, then no power, either in earth or Heaven, can save us from the bottomless pit of everlasting burning.

How many sudden deaths take place in these days. How many youths, how many men and women, in the very prime of life, and, seemingly, in the best possible health, are struck down, without the slightest warning, and hurried to judgment before they have the chance of uttering a prayer, or of exciting themselves to even a momentary act of true contrition. We constantly read of such cases. One was burned to death, another perished at sea, another, falling from on high, broke his neck. This one was run over in the street, that one was slain in a quarrel, that one succumbed suddenly to heart disease, or to some other secret and unknown malady, of which he suspected nothing. Thus, in one way or another, thousands are summoned without warning before the Judgment Seat. Which of us can promise ourselves that we shall not

be the next? We know nothing. There is no security. God alone knows. All we have to do is to be always ready, always watching and prepared.

As the issues are of the very highest importance to us we cannot take too great pains. No precaution, no preparation can possibly be excessive. Knowing, as we do, that eternity is at stake, we shall be the basest of fools, if we ever flag in our efforts to secure a happy eternity, at any price, and cost what it may.

The Gospel to-day ends with the very practical observation that "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." And this is obviously true. Men and women show far greater sense and prudence in the affairs of this world, than we, who are the "children of light" (that is to say, the children of the Church) show in the all important affairs of the next world.

Pause for a moment and consider what a thoroughly worldly man would do, did he know that he would be summoned before a merely earthly tribunal to plead for his life. Suppose he had, in a fit of passion or of irritation, lifted his hand against the heir to the throne. Or, to make the parallel more exact, suppose he had not only attempted but had actually murdered the king's eldest son, and stabbed him to death, in cold blood. He would, of course, despair of forgiveness. He would know and acknowledge that he deserved nothing but death. But the king sends his ambassador, and (in an excess of generous compassion), assures him, that if he is really sorry and sincerely repentant he will forgive him, and set him free. But he must humble himself and go down on his knees, and acknowledge his crime to his representative, and satisfy him that he is genuinely distressed and heartbroken on account of the terrible crime he has committed. Would not the guilty man rejoice? Would he not be full of gratitude for such unparalleled munificence? Above all, would he not hasten at once to comply with such simple and such easy conditions. Or would he wait and let the law take its course.

No! He would show more feeling, more gratitude, more common sense.

In a word, he would manifest a wisdom and a prudence which is commonly absent in the "children of light." If there be any man here, in mortal sin, I address myself to him individually. You are in sin. In the words of St. Paul, you have "crucified unto yourself again the Son of God, and you have made of Him a mockery." (Heb. vi. 6.) You deserve death, that is to say, eternal death. For you have crucified the Son of God. But God offers to pardon you. Offers to set you free. Yea, promises not to lay that deed of darkness to your charge. But, on one condition. On condition that you humbly acknowledge your crime to His representative, the confessor, that you express your heartfelt sorrow, and that you promise to avoid sin for the future.

Yet, you hesitate. You make difficulties. You "have not time." You are "too busy." You "hope to confess later." Alas! It is thus you act. But how inexpressibly mean, sordid, ungenerous, and contemptible. You rather run the risk of appearing before God with the condition unrealized, and to hear the sentence of reprobation. You think less of an infinite King than the worldling thinks of an earthly king, you are less concerned about eternal death than he is about a temporal death. He is wiser than you, though you are a child of light.

My brethren, the time is short. The end draws near. So let us prepare. For, "in the hour you think not of, the Son of Man will come," and then "He will render to every one, according to his works."

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Prayer: Its Efficacy

Text:—"My house is the house of prayer."—(*From the Gospel of the day.*)

ONE of the best proofs of God's goodness and love is His readiness to receive our prayers and supplications. If we wish to unburden ourselves about our difficulties or our sorrows to an earthly monarch we are at once confronted by endless obstacles. We have to wait till it suits his convenience to give us an audience; we often have to travel far, and to spend much time, and to take much trouble, before we are ushered into His presence, and even then, perhaps, he scarcely attends to our words, but hastens off to engage himself in more congenial occupation. God, on the contrary, is ever ready to harken to our prayers at all hours of the day and night, and will open His ears to our petitions, with such infinite tenderness and patience that we might almost imagine that there were no other creature in existence to solicit His attention.

He not only suffers us to address Him with the greatest familiarity, but He encourages and even commands us to do so, and is never better pleased than when we are asking Him for graces and blessings. Though He is infinitely great and exalted and we are so poor and unworthy, He neither despises nor repulses us, but treats us as a loving father treats his own children.

"Cry to me," He says, "and I will hear thee." "Call upon me, and I will deliver thee." "Everyone who asketh, receiveth," and "he that seeketh, findeth," and, again, "All things whatsoever you ask, when you pray, believe that you shall receive them, and it shall be granted unto you." And yet more forcibly still:

"Amen, amen, I say unto you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you."

These are very clear and very emphatic promises, made by One who can neither deceive nor be deceived, and yet they are but a few chosen out of many similar texts.

The promises they contain are founded upon God's infinite power and love. He is not like an earthly sovereign, whose riches are finite, and who can not give largely and generously to all without impoverishing himself; but He is the infinite Creator, who can give without suffering any loss, and who can enrich all without in any way diminishing the exhaustless treasury of His graces.

And as, on the one hand, He possesses all things, and can do all things, so, on the other hand, His affection for us is so strong that He knows not how to refuse our prayers. As the saints have so often expressed it, "He is more ready to give than we are to receive."

In order to impress us with that fact He makes use of a beautiful similitude. He bids us reflect on the natural generosity and love of an earthly father for his own children. And points out how such love, even in the imperfect earthly parent, causes him to do all that he can for his own offspring. "Which of you," he asks, "if he ask his father bread, will he give him a stone; or a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent; or if he shall ask an egg, will he reach him a scorpion. If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from Heaven give the good spirit to them that ask Him." (Luke xi. 12.)

Truly! If an earthly father, though full of imperfections and human weaknesses, is ever ready to come to the rescue of his suffering children, and can not close his ears to their cries for help and protection, how immeasurably more ready and anxious will be the all-loving and compassionate heart of our infinitely per-

fect Father in Heaven to come to our aid in all our difficulties, and in all our wants and necessities.

The inspired Scriptures are full of the most startling and the most marvelous examples of the efficacy of prayer, and we can not do better than refer to them here, in order that we may the better realize the value of this great weapon, that God has so mercifully put within our hands.

Consider the history of Abraham, and how he pleaded for the wicked cities that were doomed to destruction. The Lord said to Abraham, "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is multiplied, and their sin is become exceedingly grievous." He even declared He would utterly destroy them and all their inhabitants. Then Abraham was struck with fear, for though the men among whom he lived were wicked, he loved them as neighbors. So, drawing near to God in prayer, he said: "Wilt thou destroy the just with the wicked? If there be fifty just men in the city, shall they perish with the rest, and wilt thou not spare that place for the sake of the fifty just?" And God replied, "If I find fifty just men within the walls of Sodom I will spare the whole place for their sake." And Abraham said, "Seeing I have once begun, I will speak again to my Lord, whereas I am but dust and ashes. If there be five less than fifty just persons in the city, wilt thou destroy it?" And the Lord said, "I will not destroy it if I find five and forty." Abraham continued to plead in this manner till the Lord at last said to him: "I will not destroy it even if there be as many as ten just men." Then the Lord disappeared, and Abraham returned to his tent. The ten just men were not to be found, and the angels of God's wrath were, accordingly, sent to destroy the condemned cities. But, nevertheless, so powerful is the prayer of a just man that God would have reversed His original decision, and have spared even these sinful and impure cities, at the prayer of His servant Abraham, if but half a score of just men had been found among their inhabitants.

Or call to mind the power of prayer as illustrated by the case of Moses, another faithful servant of God. We read that when Moses was away from the camp, in close communion with God, for forty days and forty nights, the children of Israel fell into the atrocious sin of idolatry. Moses was exceedingly angry, and ordered the sons of Levi to take their swords and slay every man whom they found practising idolatry. They obeyed, and put to death about twenty-three thousand men on that one day. But the following day Moses again ascended the mountain and earnestly entreated the Lord to spare the rest of His rebellious and ungrateful people. But the Lord said: "Let me alone that I may destroy them." Then Moses bethought himself of the wonderful efficacy of prayer and, nothing doubting, began to entreat and implore for mercy. "This people hath sinned, it is true, but I beseech thee, have mercy upon them. Either forgive them this trespass, or, if thou wilt not, then strike me out of the book that thou hast written."

Here, again, prayer proved all availing. God granted his petition, and, through the powerful intercession of Moses, the people were given another chance.

The scriptural history of the great prophet Elias is rich in instances of the efficacy of prayer to move the heart of God, and to bring down His graces and blessings. Even St. James, in his Epistle, can cite no better example to move us to confidence and trust. He observes that, "Elias was a man, passible like us, and with prayer he prayed that it might not rain upon the earth, and it rained not for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the Heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit" (v. 16-18). But, marvelous as this was, he brought about still more wonderful results by the same simple means. He raised the dead body of the son of the poor widow of Sarepta to life; he multiplied the pot of meal and the little cruse of oil, which was all she had in her house, so that they sufficed for her sustenance during the

three years of scarcity; and worked many other wonders through the power of his prayers.

Another instance recorded in Holy Writ is that of Zachary and his pious consort, Elizabeth. They were childless, and for many years they continued to pray that they might have a son. Their prayers seemed to all appearances to be offered up in vain, yet, so far from losing confidence, they persevered in laying the great desire of their hearts before God. At last God determined to reward their trust, and bestowed upon them even more than they expected or asked for. They had begged for a son, who might succeed his father in the priestly office, but what God, in His generostiy, actually gave them was much more, *viz.*, a son who became a great saint, a renowned prophet of God, and the precursor of the divine Redeemer of the world. Such was the rich reward of their steadfastness and perseverance in offering their petition to God.

These instances, which might be multiplied almost indefinitely, are all taken from the inspired pages of the Holy Bible. They help us to realize how ready God is to receive our petitions and to come to our assistance in the day of trial and tribulation, and should instil into us a great love of prayer. Indeed, we should address ourselves to God with even greater confidence than the seers and prophets of old. They lived before the time of Christ. They lived before the incarnation and passion and death of the eternal Son of God had appeased the just anger of God, aroused by sin, and had disposed Him to greater leniency and compassion. We no longer plead alone, but we unite ourselves with Jesus, and taking our stand beneath the Cross, stained red with Blood of this spotless Victim, we offer up our petitions through His bitter passion and death. There is scracely a prayer offered by Christians throughout the world, whether in private, or whether in the solemn masses or public liturgy, which is not offered "through Jesus Christ our Lord." Whether we praise or petition or give thanks, it is always "through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who,

with the Father and the Holy Ghost, reigns world without end. Amen." Yet, in spite of our greater advantages, and the repeated promises of Christ, how many there are among us who complain that our prayers are not heard. Is there any justice in the complaint, and, if there be, how are we to account for it? From what does it arise?

It may rise, my brethren, from either of two causes. Either we do not ask in the manner we ought; or else we do not ask for the thing that is good for us, and helpful to our salvation.

We are wanting in faith, or in humility, or in earnestness. Perhaps we do not put our heart into our petitions, but approach the throne of God, distracted, preoccupied, and with little real attention. Or we may pray without constancy and perseverance, and so reap little fruit from our spasmodic efforts. Whatever the precise defect may be, on examination, we shall invariably find that the fault lies at our own door, and that the remedy is to be sought in a greater attention to our interior dispositions.*

Or if, on the other hand, our dispositions be perfect, and yet our petition is refused, then it is clear that we are asking for something that it is far better for us not to have. When God, in His great wisdom, sees that some object, upon which we have set our hearts, will, if granted, draw us into sin, or endanger our salvation, His very mercy will lead Him to refuse our request. We do not really know even ourselves, and often fail to read aright the secrets of our hearts. We ask a favor, not realizing what its effect may be upon us, and are unhappy because we are not given what might easily prove our ruin.

Even the most indulgent mother will not allow her infant to pluck and eat the beautiful berries of the deadly night shade, however much he may clamor for them. Nor will a loving father lend sharp and cutting implements to his children to play with, however earn-

* "You ask and receive not, *because you ask amiss.*"—(St. James iv, 3.)

estly they may petition him, because he loves them far too much to allow them to injure themselves by playing with edged tools. Now, God deals with us in a similar manner. How often it happens that in our ignorance and folly we seek for things that may become a source of dangerous temptation to us. We ask for health, when, perhaps, God sees that nothing but sickness and pain will save us from some act of folly; we ask for riches, not knowing that riches will, perhaps, fill us with pride and sinful arrogance; or we ask for a long life, when God knows that it is only by cutting short our career, and calling us away in the flower of our age, that we shall be saved from the contaminating influences of the world. "He was taken away," as the Scriptures say of such a one, "lest wickedness should alter his understanding, or deceit beguile his soul." (Wisdom iv. 11.)

God knows all things, and can see, with the utmost exactness, the future effects of present circumstances, and how the introduction of any fresh element will turn the scale in one direction or another. But we have no power to look into the future, nor can we with any degree of certainty judge of the course of events. Hence, it is not only a duty, it is likewise simple common sense and sheer prudence to leave ourselves and all our affairs in the hands of Him who knows. God loves us; yes, more truly than we love ourselves. But with this immeasurable love is conjoined infinite wisdom. Hence, if we really desire our welfare and happiness, we must abandon all to Him. We may ask, of course, for whatever we desire, but always in complete submission to His adorable will; and in so far as He, from whom nothing lies hid, sees it to be expedient. He will not let us suffer on account of our confidence; and if in His mercy, and for wise reasons, He defers or altogether refuses our request, He will, most certainly, grant us something better and more really to our advantage.

Whatever happens, our prayers are never lost. They do not sound in listless ears. They do not pass un-

heeded, but procure for us innumerable graces, blessings and favors according as God sees we need them; and, if we do not get what we ask, we may reckon, with perfect faith, on getting something far better.

The promises of God, so clearly and so frequently made, are too explicit to leave us in any doubt, on this point. "Cry to me," He says, "and I will hear thee." (Jerem. xxxiii. 3.) "He will surely have pity on thee, at the voice of thy cry; as soon as he shall hear he will answer thee." (Isai, xxx. 19.) "Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in my name he will give it to you." (John xvi. 23.) "The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds." (Eccles. xxxv. 21.) "This is the confidence which we have toward God, that whatsoever we shall ask, according to his will, he heareth us." (1 John v. 14.)

These, and innumerable other texts, prove to us how ready, and even anxious, God is to befriend us and to help us in all our necessities.

Let us then frequently have recourse to Him. And, in order to render our prayer more powerful and efficacious, let us offer it up through the pure and immaculate hands of Mary. To ask her to pray for us and with us, is a sure means of commanding success. She is our mother, and looks upon us as her children, and will not only present our petitions before the throne of mercy, but will also, if we earnestly entreat, unite her voice with ours, and make intercessions for us, and St. Bernard assures us that no one ever had recourse to her without being heard and helped.

The importance and the efficiency of prayer can not be overestimated. It is the key, the golden key, that opens out the treasury of divine favors. It is an inexhaustible source of strength, and light, and grace. Who perseveres in prayer is certain to be saved, whereas even the sublimest saint on earth will soon sink low and lower into the filthy slough of sin if he omit this holy exercise, and give up the special and simple means prescribed by Jesus Christ, when He says, "Ask, and you will receive."

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

On Miracles

Text:—"To some indeed, by the Holy Spirit, is given the working of miracles."—(*From the Epistle of the day.*)

EVERY age has a distinctive character of its own, which marks it off from all that have preceded it. Thus, we have had ages of rank paganism and ages of sterling faith; ages of religious persecution and ages of religious fervor; and so on throughout the centuries. To-day we are living in an age of scepticism and doubt, of incredulity and denial.

There is hardly any doctrine however holy, hardly any dogma however well grounded, that is not loudly and insolently denied by some class of men. And, the more thoroughly supernatural the belief may be, the more certain are worldly-minded men to quarrel with it, and to condemn it. This being the case, it is hardly to be wondered at that the belief in those portentious occurrences in nature, that go by the name of Miracles, should arouse the opposition of many writers and thinkers to-day, and should be declared by them absurd and wholly unreasonable.

The extraordinary advances of science and the stronger realization of the reign of law that is found to prevail in every part of the known universe, have rendered men impatient of the very idea of any violation of the ordinary sequence of events, and of any departure from the pre-established order. Their one great aim is to discover the rules that regulate the world around them, and all it contains. But once these rules have been laid bare, they wish to apply them strictly and universally, and can brook no exceptions. If fire does not always burn; if cork does not always float; if water does not always seek its own level; if, in a word, law is not constant, changeless

and reliable, how, they ask, can there be any real knowledge? How can science be progressive or even possible?

It is thus that men argue whose thoughts are riveted upon this world alone and who mind earthly things. To those, on the contrary, who take a wider survey, and who look beyond the visible phenomena to the invisible Creator of them all, the universe presents a much more impressive, as well as an immeasurably sublimer picture. To the Catholic the creation is no mere piece of machinery which has been set going, nobody knows how and nobody knows by whom! It is no clever automaton, which must not be disturbed nor interfered with lest its complicated parts should get out of order and its wheels should cease to turn. No. Such is rather the notion of the unbeliever and the atheist.

To the man of faith the external world is but as the soft clay in the hands of an all-powerful and all-wise Artist who has not only impressed on it the shape it now possesses, but who can change it, and modify it, and add a stroke here or erase a line there, just as He pleases. He is the Infinite and the Omnipotent, and not like a poor human modeler who erects his little statue and then leaves it rigid and dry and unchangeable in its niche. No! The Divine Artist never lets the clay out of His own hands, but keeps it ever in His care, as soft and yielding to every pressure of His fingers as liquid wax.

But let us drop metaphor and state our belief in simpler words.

In the first place, we may well pause to inquire what it is that we mean precisely by a miracle. In reply, we can not do better than accept St. Thomas Aquinas' definition. He says that it is "A sensible effect, produced by God, which transcends all the forces of nature."

Now an event may transcend the forces of nature in three different ways. Firstly, it may involve an act which no power in nature can ever produce under

any circumstances or conditions whatever. Such a miracle takes place when the same body is made to occupy two different places at the same time: this we find in the bilocation of some of the saints.

Secondly, it may involve an act which nature may indeed produce, but not *under the same circumstances,* as for instance the flowering of a dry and dead branch in the depth of winter. Nature can produce blossoms and flowers on a branch, but *not under such circumstances.*

Thirdly, it may involve an act which nature may indeed produce but *not in the same manner.* If, for example, a man have his legs broken, nature may knit together the shattered bones and heal the wounds by a slow and gradual process. But a sudden and instantaneous and complete cure could not be ascribed to unassisted nature, but would partake of the character of a miracle.

Thus we see miracles are of three degrees; examples of each of which are met with both in the Holy Scriptures as well as in the lives of the Saints

Why are such events denied? It can only be on one of two grounds. It must be either because God *can not* transcend the forces of nature, or it must be because He *will* not. If we are believers in God's existence (and we are not now addressing atheists), it can be only for one or another of these two reasons. We will consider each separately and show that both objections are utterly groundless.

To assert that God the Omnipotent Creator is hampered and restricted in His operations by the very creatures to whom He has given existence, is such an extravagant statement that it is difficult to see how any reflecting mind can entertain it for one moment. Its best refutation is simply to recall facts which we all. as Christians, openly admit. As we are all fully aware: God exists independently of creatures, He existed when nothing else existed. Then (to speak in a human way) a moment came when He determined to exercise His Omnipotence, and to call other beings

into existence. He founded the earth and stretched forth the heavens, and established laws to govern and control all that He created. These laws, which we find running through all nature, are His, just as much as the objects that they govern. He is absolute Lord and Master, not only of the material universe which we can see, but also of the forces and powers which we can not see. Nothing can withstand His power or offer any opposition to His will. "All things whatsoever he wishes he does."

So dependent are all creatures on God, that nothing can endure for one brief moment unless He support it. For God to forget any creature would mean the end of that creature. It would at once cease to be. Did He relax His hold on any being whatsoever, that being would fall back into its original nothingness just as certainly and as promptly as a stone now held between my fingers would fall to earth were I to open my hand.

It stands to reason that He who made all things and who gave laws to rule all things, and whose assistance and support are needed to maintain them, must possess full power to alter, or suspend, or to modify what, at every succeeding moment, is so absolutely dependent upon Him. The difficulty in admitting miracles, if difficulty there be, can not possibly come from any want of power on the part of God. We may then dismiss the first objection without further delay.

But is there any greater force in the second objection? Evidently not. It is objected that any change in the laws of nature, established by God, is impossible, because it would imply a change in the Unchangeable, and that it would indicate an alteration in the divine mind and purpose; and further, that the whole of nature is so intimately connected and bound together that an exception or a relxation or a suspension in any law would mean a dislocation of the entire universe and tend to breed confusion. But such reasoning betrays an ignorance which is little creditable to the objector.

The Divine immutability is in no way compromised

by a miracle, since a miracle argues no change in the decrees of God. St. Augustine expresses the whole doctrine, with his usual accuracy and precision, in a single sentence: "*Deus opera mutat, non consilium.*" God produces a change in external things, but there is no change in His own mind. Both the laws and the exceptions to those laws fall under the same divine Providence. He does not first establish a law and then suspend it when some special and unforeseen circumstance arises. There is no future in God's knowledge, and nothing unforeseen. Every circumstance which to us is future, is seen by Him, as actually present. His plans are laid from the beginning, with the full and present consciousness of every prayer that will ever be addressed to Him, and of every circumstance that would make a miracle useful or desirable. The interruption of a law, or the suspension of a decree, on account of exceptional circumstances, such as the need of manifesting His power, or the testifying to the truth of some doctrine, is all provided for and arranged from eternity, and denotes no shadow of mutability in the mind of the Supreme Ruler of the Universe. To deny this argues confusion in the mind of the objector.

The Incarnation was decreed so soon as man's fall was known to God; and the fall was known, not only at the moment of its commission, but from the very first; that is to say, from all eternity. But, with the knowledge before Him, God decreed not only to send His only begotten Son, in human form, but He decreed to offer all men striking evidence of His Son's divine personality. For this purpose He decreed that Christ should impress His followers by the complete control He exercised over even the most stubborn laws of nature. Hence we watch Him as He stills the tempest, multiplies the loaves, changes the water into wine, raises the dead, and so forth. These and the other miracles He worked suppose no change in God, since they did not originate as an afterthought, but were decreed simultaneously with the very laws to

which they were destined to form such notable exceptions. Further, they were ordained for a wise and most useful and beneficent purpose, *viz.*, to convince men of the truth of Christ's mission.

What possible exception can even the most perverse take to such a course? Or how will he contend that it interferes either with the wisdom or the immutability of the Supreme Being, who disposes all things with infinite sweetness and forethought?

And this explanation of our Lord's miracles holds good—*postis ponendis*—of the miracles worked by others in His name. In every instance the event, however marvelous, was decreed from the beginning and formed a part of that Divine plan which has existed in the mind of God ever since God has been God.

But some object to miracles, because they think that any disturbance of the regular and orderly sequence of events tends to throw the whole mechanism of the universe out of gear. But is this true? It is so far from being true that even we, ordinary sinful men and women, are constantly interrupting and interfering with the action of nature's laws in all parts of the world by the exercise of our free wills, but without any disastrous consequences following. It may, of course, be urged that we suspend the action of a law only by the application of a higher law. Be it so. This creates no difficulty. For God's will is the supreme law, so surely His interference is not so much the abolition of law as the predominance of a higher over an inferior law.

Consider how man himself can suspend or reverse the action of the laws of nature. Take the law of gravitation. Is it wholly inamenable to our will? An example will show. Here is a heavy stone resting on the ground. The weight of gravity tends to keep it fastened and riveted to the earth. But I stretch down and, seizing hold of the stone, I lift it up over my head, a distance of six feet. What has happened? I have not indeed destroyed the attraction of gravity. No. But I have, in this particular case, and so far as the

stone is concerned, rendered it inoperative. Indeed, I have so utterly counteracted its effect that the stone, instead of following the line of gravity, and *falling* from A to B, *rises* in opposition to gravity's force and describes a path from B to A. Have I, in consequence, thrown the whole machinery of the Universe out of gear? Have I, even in an infinitesimal degree, tended to produce confusion? Evidently not.

And if I, with my extremely circumscribed powers, can so modify and control and suspend the action of some of nature's laws, is it reasonable to deny to God and His chosen representatives the power of modifying and controlling and suspending the operations of all nature's laws, even the laws of death and disease?

If I consider the example of the lifting of the stone I shall find that the act was not a necessary consequence of and pre-existing force or series of forces—not a link in an endless chain—but that it was a direct interference of my own perfectly free will. Though I know not *how* my will, which is an immaterial force of my immaterial soul, can act upon matter, yet I know that it does so act when it causes my muscles to move and contract and to raise a weight, or perform other operations. And what is the interference? Well, clearly that what I can do in a *limited* way God can do in an *unlimited* way.

But the clearest and strongest proof we have that miracles are possible is that they have so often happened. This is a fact that may be shown, like any other fact, by an appeal to the testimony of witnesses. The verdict of honest and unimpeachable eyewitnesses ought to be enough to satisfy reasonable men. For such witnesses are not asked to do anything abstruse or difficult, but merely to observe what is taking place before their eyes. When the blind man in the Gospel received his sight it required no extraordinary sagacity on the part of his parents and relations and friends who had known him and compassionated him on his infirmity for twenty years or more, to note what had taken place. It was clear to all that, before our

Lord touched him, he was blind. It was equally patent to all that afterwards he had the complete use of his eyes. The born-blind suddenly received his sight. He who could not see now sees. If the testimony of men on a simple matter of fact such as that is not proof enough, then human evidence can never demonstrate anything, and the very courts of law had better be closed.

Miracles have been proved to have happened in the past, and as God's hands are not shortened, we shall not be surprised to learn that they happen also in these days.

We will close our sermon to-day with a striking instance in point, taken *verbatim,* though not *in extenso,* from an interesting account given by Dr. G. Marsh.

"Peter de Rudder, a laborer, aged forty-four, was employed by Viscount de Bus, and lived at Iabbeke, in Belgium, when on February 16, 1867, he sustained a fracture of the left leg, in which both the bones, tibia and fibula, were broken below the knee joint. The limb was put in a starch bandage by Dr. Affanaer, of Oudenburg. Owing to the severe suffering of the patient, the surgeon removed the bandage, when he found an ulcer communicating with the fractured bones, which were bathed in pus. Periostitis had set in. After many months of futile treatment other advice was sought. Dr. Jacques and Dr. Verriot, of Bruges, were consulted, as also Dr. Van Hostenberghe, of Stachille. *All agreed that the case was incurable,* and that only amputation remained. Then the Viscount sought the opinion of Prof. Thiriat, of Brussels, who confirmed that of his confreres.

"De Rudder, however, refused to lose his leg, and for a year remained in bed. During the years that followed he got about on crutches and presented a most pitiable sight to all who saw him. Eight years after the accident, April 5, 1875, he obtained permission from the new Viscount (for the old one had died), to go to the Grotto of the Blessed Virgin at Oostacker, a place of pilgrimage much venerated in Belgium. In

January of that very year Dr. Affanaer had seen the wound and certified to its condition. Later still, Dr. Verrier corroborated his verdict. Nine days before the pilgrimage some of the neighbors saw and examined the wound. On the very day itself on which he obtained leave to go to Oostacker, those who dressed the limb saw the broken ends of the bones, the interval between the upper and lower fragments, the open ulcers, and the swollen condition of the leg. On the following day, April 6, the evening before De Rudder set out on his eventful journey to Oostacker, all these details were again seen by other witnesses. On his arrival at the Shrine he was helped to a seat in front of the spot where a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes had been erected. There he drank of the water, and in fervent prayer besought Jesus Christ, through the prayers of His Blessed Mother, to restore to health his broken limb, that he might be able once more to work for the support of his wife and children. Suddenly he arose, leaving his crutches behind him, and walked to the Grotto, kneeling there in prayer. Then, springing to his feet, he burst forth in thanks to God, declaring that he was cured. Accompanied by his wife and a great crowd he walked upright and unaided by his crutches to the castle of the Marchioness of Costabonne, using his once shattered leg as freely as the other. There he was examined. It was found that the swelling had disappeared, the bandages had fallen off, the wounds of the leg and foot were healed, the upper and lower ends of the two bones had been reunited, and there was no longer the interval between them. The two legs were of identically the same length and of equal soundness and value.

"For twenty-three years De Rudder lived and worked in the employment of the Viscount, and eventually died from pneumonia at the age of seventy-five, on March 22, 1898. The cure was not only instantaneous, but permanent."

Many further particulars might be added in further corroboration of this miracle. But enough has been

said to bring conviction to any unprejudiced mind. This is but one miracle among a multitude which have been worked even in our own time. They are open to the examination and study of all who are interested. The evidence of so many and such competent witnesses, many of whom are still alive, should be enough and more than enough, not only to prove that miracles really are possible, but that they still take place, even in this incredulous age.

They show that God's hand is not shortened, but that now, as always, He is the Master in His own creation, and can do whatsoever He wills. To Him be glory and honor, forever and ever. Amen.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Man's Spiritual Blindness

Text:—"They bring to Him one deaf and dumb, and they besought Him that He would lay His hand upon him. And, taking him from the multitude apart, He put His fingers into his ears and, spitting, He touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, He groaned and said to him, Ephpheta, which is: Be thou opened. And immediately his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke right, etc., etc."—(*From the Gospel of the day.*)

THE Fathers of the Church, who comment upon the passage just read, tell us that, in working the miracles above mentioned, our Blessed Lord had a twofold object. The first was to manifest His divine power, and as it were to present His credentials; the second was to show forth, in a manner which all could easily understand, certain moral truths. Though the Jews, who stood around might not have grasped the double purpose of the prodigies, which they witnessed, yet we who have entered into the full light of the Gospel are well able to understand them and to learn the important lessons that they are intended to convey.

The deaf and dumb man, who was brought to Christ to be cured, is a type of the spiritually deaf and dumb, of whom, alas! a very large number are to be found in every country, and these can be cured only through the goodness and the power of the Redeemer. Now, just as those who are physically deaf and dumb are indifferent to all the sounds that reveberate around them, and heed not the voice of their fellow men, so the souls that have been struck spiritually deaf by the malice of the devil become in like manner, to a great extent, insensible to the voice of God, whether He speak by interior admonitions or by the external voice of His ministers and representatives. Such persons may be compared to the idols of the heathen, for "they have ears, but they hear not."

This was the sad state in which Jesus Christ found

almost the entire world when He came down from Heaven, took flesh and dwelt amongst us. The Law, which had been so solemnly promulgated on Mount Sinai amid thunders and lightnings and quaking of the earth, was indeed received by one small nation, but was ignored or unheard of by all the rest. Even the heavens and the earth and all that they contain, which by day and night "proclaim the glory of God," made no impression on the great masses of mankind. While the voice of conscience, which the Creator has implanted within our soul, and which is intended to direct and admonish every man who comes into this world, was habitually drowned by the more strident voices of pride and worldly passion.

Jesus Christ, however, came at last to cure this universal deafness. At the sound of His all-powerful voice the world began by degrees to awaken from its lethargy, and to listen and to understand. In an incredibly short time tens of thousands and millions poured into the early Christian Church. Entire nations and peoples cheerfully and gratefully received the words of God, and wellnigh the whole of Europe began in the course of time to practice the Catholic Faith. Christ had touched the deaf world. Christ had cried "Ephpheta," and had "renewed the face of the earth." The better part of the human race is happily still Christian, and multitudes still listen to the voice of God, but it must be confessed that large numbers, even of nominal Christians, have fallen away from their first fervor and have become spiritually deaf and dumb.

It is not that Christ has ceased to speak. No. For, though He has withdrawn His sensible presence, and no longer addresses the world in His own divine person, as He did when He walked through the country about Galilee and Samaria, He still speaks by the mouth of His ministers, his Bishops and priests. The doctrine which He came to promulgate is still taught by His infallible Church. What is wanting is not instruction, but rather a willingness to learn and to

profit by the opportunities afforded. How few are they who may be said really to "hear" the Word of God. Some carefully avoid all sermons and discourses altogether. Others will condescend to sit at the foot of the pulpit, but will take no pains to profit by what is said. Others again will listen, in a vague sort of way, but scarcely ever think of applying the words to themselves. The sound of the words reaches them, but not the sense. They have no true desire to learn. Indeed the reproach which God once made to the Jews by the mouth of Zacharias the prophet might well be made to many Christians at the present day, "The word of the Lord came to Zacharias, but they would not hearken, and they stopped their ears not to hear. And they made their hearts as the adamant stone, lest they should hear the Law, and the words which the Lord of hosts sent in His spirit by the hand of His prophets." (Zach. vii. 11.)

If this unwillingness to pay attention to God's minister were the only fault, it would be serious enough, but it is not only against the words of the preacher in the pulpit that men nowadays close their ears. They are found to be unwilling to heed the admonition of God, no matter what may be the manner in which He may wish to speak to them. The interior inspirations of His Holy Spirit they will reject; the sense of shame and the remorse which He arouses within them, they will smother; the examples of the virtuous, with which He seeks to encourage them, they will treat with scorn; and the sight of His dreadful chastisements, which He brings before them again and again, they will dismiss as of no significance whatever. If in mercy He visits them with some painful sickness they will murmur, but not amend; and if He allows some dire misfortune or trouble to come upon them, in order to arouse them, they will take offense, but take no warning. They, in short, close up every entry into their hearts so that the loving voice of God cannot gain admission. "Behold! I stand at the gate and knock." But "they refuse to understand and to re-

spond, says the prophet, because they wish to continue in their sin." (Psalm xxxv. 4.)

The physically deaf enjoy one advantage at least over the spiritually deaf; they know their deficiency, and they are anxious to be cured and will go in search of the physician. But the spiritually deaf are all unconcerned about their appalling state. So far from lamenting it, they rejoice at it. Instead of wishing for a cure, they dread the very thought of it. And will fly from every suggested remedy instead of anxiously seeking to discover one. The result is that vast numbers of Christians continue in their sins and grow continually older without growing any better or any more fit for the severe examination to which they will have to submit on the quickly approaching day of reckoning.

If we seek the cause, we shall find that the reason why most men's ears are deaf to the voice of God is because they are kept ever open to all other voices. One cannot give one's attention at the same time to two different speakers, nor can one listen with equal readiness to both, if each seeks to draw us in the opposite direction. In short, it is impossible at one and the same time to attend to the exhortations of God and to the suggestions of the devil. God commands us to renounce the world and all its pomps; and the world persuades us to disregard and to turn a deaf ear to the commands and the warnings of God. And, unhappily, it happens but too often that the voice of the world proves the more successful.

God commands us to take up our cross daily and to follow Him; the world, on the contrary, tells us to do nothing of the kind, but to follow our own sweet will. God bids us practise poverty, at least in spirit, and to lay up for ourselves treasures in Heaven; the world bids us love earthly possessions and to add continuously to our present treasures. God exhorts us to practise humility, whereas the world bids us cultivate vanity and selfcomplacency. God urges us to forgive injuries; the world would have us take ven-

geance on all who offend us. And in all these cases, we, for the most part, prefer to listen to the voice of the tempter than to the voice of God; to obey one who flatters us, rather than one who admonishes us; and to encourage one who approves of our folly and of our sinfulness, rather than one who frankly points out the straight way to Heaven and eternal bliss. This unwillingness to receive the admonitions and the reprimands of God is not only insulting to God, and wrong in itself, but it is fraught with the most serious consequences. For if we refuse to listen to Him, He will refuse to listen to us when we call upon Him, and when we stand most in need of His aid. "I have spoken to you, saith the Lord, and you have not heard; and I have called you, and you have not answered. . . . And as a consequence I will cast you away from before my face, as I have cast away all your brethren." (Jerem. vii. 13-15.) Solicitations, reproaches, promises and threats, interior and exterior graces, have been tried in turn, but have produced no effect. All have been unheeded and despised. Consequently, as every opportunity rejected, only adds still further to your guilt, these opportunities will be withdrawn and God will punish your hardness of heart by leaving you severely alone and abandoning you to your own devices.

Surely, none of us wishes to experience such isolation! Then how are we to act? How are we to cure our spiritual disease? We may gather the answer by considering the manner in which our Lord proceeded to cure the deaf and dumb man. The very first thing He did was to withdraw him aside from the crowd. By this He would instruct us that if we would cure our spiritual deafness, we must begin by withdrawing ourselves from the cares and distractions of life. The tumult and bustle of the world deafens us and hinders us from catching the low whispers of divine grace. Its pleasures and amusements distract us and prevent us attending as we should. So long as the world draws us into its vortex of dissipation and excitement, our

senses are too disturbed and our imagination too agitated to allow us to distinguish the divine voice from the innumerable worldly voices reverbrating around at the same time. We are assailed *without,* by the voices of evil councellors, and by the mutterings and suggestions of the suspicious, the jealous, the uncharitable, and the impure; and we are assailed *within* by the yet more seductive voices of prejudice, passion, human respect and ambition, crying out all together, and utterly drowning the gentle voice of Almighty God. For, though that divine voice is "living and effectual and more piercing than any two-edged sword, and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit," as St. Paul writes in his Epistle to the Hebrews (iv. 12), yet it is soft and gentle in tone and audible to the attentive ear alone. In order that it may produce even the greatest effects, it is not necessary that it should resound with a great noise. No: the merest whisper, when that whisper comes from God, suffices "to break the cedars of Libanus." For, "the voice of the Lord is in power, the voice of the Lord is in magnificence," as holy David tells us. (Psalm xxviii. 4, 5.) But, in order that it should reach the innermost centre of the heart, the greatest attention is requisite. Hence we should draw aside from the world and its innumerable distractions, at least for a time, that we may profit by the divine inspirations. "I will lead him into solitude," says Almighty God, "and I will speak to his heart." It is in solitude that His words are best heard. There the distractions of the world do not penetrate; there the babble of discordant voices are hushed; there will be found a peace and a tranquillity highly favorable to these divine communications. There is nothing equal to solitude for disposing the soul for calm reflection and communion with God.

If, my brethren, you are conscious of your need, break away for a time at least from the fetters of the world. Resolve to enter upon a short retreat; prepare your soul to hear the counsels that Jesus Christ

has to breathe into your ears; and exclaim in the words and in the contrite and loving spirit of the royal Psalmist: "I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me, for He will speak peace unto them that are converted to the heart." (Ps. lxxxiv. 9.)

But to proceed, after having taken the deaf and dumb man apart from the crowd, Jesus Christ "put His fingers into his ears, and spitting, He touched his tongue." By that act He wished to show us that only the finger of God is able to remove and overcome the obstacles that prevent our hearing His divine words. When the magicians saw the wonders wrought by Aaron, which they themselves were powerless to bring about, they exclaimed: "This is the finger of God!" (Exod. viii. 19.) So, too, when we contemplate the wonders of divine grace, that are wrought in the souls of those who willingly "hear the Word of God and keep it," we feel impelled to cry out: "*Digitus Dei est hic.*" "The finger of God is here."

Though the miracles that God operates in the order of nature, such as the curing of the deaf and the blind, and so forth, impress the multitudes who witness them far more readily and far more deeply than the miracles which He works in the order of grace, such as the repentance of a sinner or the conversion of a heretic, yet we know full well that the latter are in sober truth immeasurably greater. We Bishops and priests have been sent by Christ to address the faithful in every land, and some of us have been called to carry the glad tidings of His Gospel among heathens and idolators. In His name we preach in season and out of season, and we reap a more or less abundant harvest. But whether the results be little or great, must ever depend, not upon our own feeble efforts, but upon the blessing and grace of God alone. The call of a heretic to the true fold; the conversion of a soul steeped in sin, or even the mere advance of a good man from a lower to a higher degree of grace and perfection, are all miracles of God's own right hand. The missioner may preach and exhort and threaten and

use his best endeavors to influence the souls of his hearers, but he is well aware that all his efforts will be in vain, unless God Himself extend His hand and come to his assistance. Preachers may indeed plant and water and work up the ground, but God alone can give the increase. "Therefore neither is he that planteth anything, nor he that watereth, but God alone is all in all." (1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.) The most renowned orators, and the most successful apostles and evangelists are but weak instruments in the hands of an omnipotent God. If they succeed in touching the hearts of hardened sinners, if they bring back the lost sheep to the fold, or pierce the ears that have been long closed to every appeal and to every argument, they cannot ascribe this fruit to their own endeavors, but wholly and entirely to the mercy and goodness of that Good Shepherd who gave His life for His sheep, and who pours out the life-giving Blood, shed in His bitter Passion upon the souls of all, who will yield to His secret and gentle influence.

Whether we be priests or lay people, let us bear this well in mind. Our efforts to help poor sinners or to enlighten friends or neighbors, who sit in spiritual darkness and in the shadow of death, must remain sterile, unless we can command the cooperation of our Divine Lord. Nothing will be better calculated to defeat our highest purpose than to place any trust in our own unaided attempts. We are surrounded in this land by immense numbers who either have never practised any religion whatever, or who have long since given it up. The vast populations of our big cities live as though eternity were a dream, and Heaven and hell but figments of the imagination. They laugh and talk, labor and play, unconcerned about any future, and neither think nor care to think of the inevitable Judgment that awaits them. Like the deaf and dumb man in the Gospel, the ears of their soul are closed to all supernatural influences. Nothing but a miracle of grace, such as our Lord performed on the man in to-day's Gospel, is capable of arousing them. If then

we feel compassion for them, as indeed we ought; if we would arouse them to a sense of their appalling position before it is too late, we must lift our eyes to Heaven and invoke the mercy of God upon them. God's hand is not shortened, and He is more anxious to exercise His power than we are to invoke it. "Ask," He says, "and you shall receive." "If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you." Above all: "Pray for one another, that you may be saved. For the continual prayer of the just man availeth much." (James v. 16.)

The important question is: Do we pray for one another? Do we make a point of helping our fellow-countrymen, our neighbors, our many non-Catholic friends and acquaintances, by this means, which God has put within reach of all of us? If not, then we are neglecting a serious obligation. Are we not commanded to love one another? Is not the love of the brethren one of the marks by which we are to be known and recognized as Christ's disciples? Most undoubtedly. Then how can we be said truly to love our unfortunate brethren if we refuse to help them in their most pressing need? O! If they were suffering from some physical ailment, if they were wasting away for want of material food, if they were in danger of some appalling bodily death, we should probably be much more ready to bestir ourselves and to fly to their aid. Yet, if properly understood, their actual condition is infinitely worse, for they are stained with the deadly leprosy of sin, and are running a fearful risk of being flung headlong into the bottomless abyss of hell. By our earnest prayers, we may save them from that horrible fate. We may gain them the grace of repentence. We may enable them to recognize their imminent danger and their pressing obligations, and so induce them to make their peace with God, and by that means to attain, in the end, eternal life and the transcendent delights of Heaven. "Pray for one another," says the Holy Ghost. This is clearly an exhortation, even if it be not a direct command. And why

are we asked to pray for one another? "In order that you may be saved," continues the same divine authority. Will you, my brethren, seek to excuse yourselves by alleging your unworthiness? Or will you urge the uselessness of all such petitions? No! You dare not, for the infallible word of God explicitly declares that "The continuous prayer of the just man availeth much."

Those who brought the deaf and dumb man to our Blessed Lord must have been intensely pleased and gratified when they contemplated the successful results of their charity. And the poor man himself must have cherished a life long friendship for those to whom (under God) he was indebted for his miraculous cure. But great as this reward was, it is as nothing when compared to the reward awaiting those who by their prayers and supplications have brought abandoned souls to the feet of Christ, and have rescued them from the fangs of the devil, and placed them safely in His loving hands.

We may know but little of our privileges while we are still here on earth, but if ever, by God's infinite mercy we should be received into His Heavenly Courts we shall surely realize, with supreme delight, the effect of our prayers. Just conceive, if you can, the satisfaction, yea, the absolute delight that will fill your heart on meeting in Heaven the souls of those who, but for you, would never have found their way there. Try and imagine the joy that will flow through you as you behold a glorious servant of God, clothed with beauty and grace as with a garment, and sparkling with radiance before the Throne of God, and are told that it was your earnest prayers that won for him the grace of conversion, and the gift of final perseverance. "The continuous prayers of the just man availeth much"; they will cause many to be saved, who would otherwise have been lost, and every one so saved will feel and acknowledge his indebtedness. There is no such thing as ingratitude, or forgetfulness of past favors in the Kingdom of God. If then we have made

a point of interceding for sinners during our whole life we shall most certainly succeed in bringing great numbers to the haven of eternal rest. If they reach their desired end before us, we may safely reckon on their powerful assistance before the Throne of God, while we are still battling with temptation on earth. If, on the contrary, we are the first to enter into eternal rest, then we shall await their arrival with altogether special interest, and they, on their part, will greet us with expressions of the most fervent gratitude and beam upon us with an affection as deep and as lasting as the depth of the misery from which our prayers have delivered them. Oh! It is a noble and a glorious work to interest ourselves in the welfare of all for whom Christ died, and to lift up our voices to Heaven on their behalf. Many of us are far too self-centered and narrow in our sympathies. We confine our attention to our own immediate wants, and to the needs of our personal friends and acquaintances and seldom raise our eyes to look abroad over the length and breadth of this world where so many millions of immortal souls are continuously working out their eternal fate, and awaiting, in a state almost of unconsciousness, the approaching solemn and irrevocable sentence, soon to be pronounced upon them. Let us exercise a greater generosity and do all in our power to promote the eternal interests of the multitudes for whom Christ died. It ought to be a joy for us to cooperate with the incarnate Son of God in the salvation of the world. If we share in His labors on earth we shall, most assuredly share in His glory in Heaven. A blessing, etc.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

How to Secure Eternal Life

Text:—"And behold a certain lawyer stood up tempting Him and saying, Master, what must I do to possess ETERNAL LIFE? But He said to him: What is written in the law? How readest thou? He, answering, said: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind."—(*From the Gospel of the day.*)

ETERNAL Life! Eternal Life! What, my dear brethren, are we to understand by these words? We know but too clearly what temporal Life is. But how shall we explain Eternal Life? We may say that it is the Life which will be enjoyed by the just made perfect, so soon as their present state of trial and of temptation is over. It is the one true full and complete state of existence; a state, compared to which the present Life, even at its best, is but a poor shadow and a dim and unworthy reflection.

So long as we are imprisoned in this world, we carry about with us the fatal germs of disease and dissolution. We are no sooner born than we begin to die. "Man, born of woman," says holy Job, "living for a short time, is filled with many miseries" (xiv. 1). Sickness, pain, disease, labor, anxiety, poverty and finally death mark his brief passage through this valley of tears. "The days of man's earthly life," says The Following of Christ, "are short and evil, full of grief and distress, where man is defiled with many sins, ensnared with many passions, attacked with many fears, harassed by many cares, distracted by many novelties, entangled by many vanities, encompassed by many errors, worn out by many labors, assailed by many temptations, enervated with pleasures and tormented with many wants." (Chap. xlviii, Book iii.)

Such is our *temporal* Life; our *eternal* Life, on the

other hand, is the Life enjoyed by the Blessed in Heaven, where perfect peace and unadulterated joy and pure happiness reign supreme. It is a Life which consists in the complete and secure and permanent possession of every conceivable good, and the total absence of every possible evil. It is a Life of the intensest delight passed in the contemplation of the infinitely Beautiful, and the infinitely Good, in that glorious Palace, not made with hands, wherein God manifests Himself in all His splendor and in all His uncreated magnificence to those whom He has redeemed by His most precious Blood.

That such an abode of exquisite beauty and measureless delight really exists is most certain and incontrovertible; but you, my beloved brethren, in the midst of your innumerable trials and tribulations, may exclaim: "Even though such a truly magnificent Home exists, surely it cannot be destined for the like of me! Surely, such a poor little worm of the earth as I am has no right to aspire after such unspeakable joys. Is it indeed a fact that one day I may be actually invited to enter into that celestial abode, and to share in the privileges of the highest angels and archangels?"

Ah, yes, my dear brethren, it is indeed true. In spite of our lowliness and our unworthiness we know, with the certainty of divine faith, that we are not only candidates and aspirants, but that God, in His infinite mercy, goodness and generosity has actually created us for no less an end than to occupy a place in His heavenly kingdom. He has done more. He has made us his children by adoption, and heirs to all His possessions. The glory and the splendor and the unimaginable beauty and loveliness of Heaven have in sober truth been prepared for us from the beginning of the world by the munificence of our heavenly Father, so that it rests with us whether we really enter into possession or not. If only we serve God aright; if only we are "faithful unto death," we shall hear the supreme Judge addressing to us those admirable and

blessed words: "Come ye blessed of my Father, possess you the Kingdom PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD." (Matt. xxv. 34.) Well, then, may we imitate the Lawyer spoken of in the Gospel, and ask: *What must I do* to possess Eternal Life. With good reason may we seek to discover the golden key that can alone open for us the Gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem and admit us to the full enjoyment of God's choicest gifts. What must I do to possess Eternal Life? We reply, in the first place, that whatever the condition may be, it is most certainly within the reach of every man born into this world. For, since all, without exception are called to Eternal Life, it necessarily follows that all are given the requisite means of attaining it. Otherwise, indeed, God would not be just, which it were blasphemy even to think.

Now the Golden Key is nothing more nor less than THE LOVE OF GOD. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." Those few words contain the whole secret of Eternal Life, which is thus put within the reach of all. For surely every man. whatever his position and whatever his profession, can love the infinitely loveable! Every living creature, who has a heart and a rational soul, can long for the infinitely good. Whether old or young; learned or ignorant; rich or poor; free or in bondage; in health or in sickness; every man, woman and child is able to love the great Creator, who is not only infinite holy in Himself, but who is also the one supreme source of all holiness in creatures, and the Author of every grace and blessing and favor and gift that we ourselves possess. Yes; it is easy for man to love God, in any position, in which he may find himself; yet love is all that is needed in order to "possess Eternal Life."

But, beloved brethren, bear this well in mind. When we point to love as the one and only essential condition of salvation, we mean real genuine love, and

not its mere counterfeit. As this distinction is of the utmost importance, we must explain it, and so make sure of our ground before proceeding further.

The love, then, that is to overcome every obstacle and to carry us triumphantly straight into Heaven is a very real and a very sterling and practical thing. Let us begin by considering what it is NOT. It is not emotion, nor feeling, nor sentiment, nor poetry. It is not made up of long drawn sighs, nor of scalding tears; nor does it consist in burning words, nor in striking attitudes. No; love is the close union between the heart of man and the heart of God. It is a union of hearts. Or (since the heart is but a symbol of the Will) let us rather say that Love is the union of two wills, *viz.*, the created will of man with the uncreated Will of God.

Observe, my brethren, that so long as our Wills remain in complete subjection to the divine Will, we must necessarily be free from all sin. And who is free from sin is fit for Heaven, and is in very truth loving God. In fact this is precisely the test which our Blessed Lord applies. "If you love Me," He declares, "you will keep My commandments." And again, in another place: "If any man love Me, he will keep My word." Hence, too, St. John writes: "This is the charity of God, that we keep His commandments." (1 John v. 3.) We love God when we readily give up our own will to do His, and when our one ambition is to please Him in all things.

We may not be conscious of any sensible devotion; we may *feel* no affection for God, we may even experience a certain coldness and dryness and weariness. It matters not. Our feelings are not under our control, and consequently possess neither merit nor demerit. Provided only that we are determined to do God's Will, and that we are really keeping His commandments, we may rest assured that we are in very truth loving God and showng a true and sincere affection for Him.

God is infinitely perfect; and His laws and His pre-

cepts are but the external expression of His interior perfection. Hence it follows, that the more fully and the more thoroughly we subject our wayward will to His all holy Will, the more perfect we become, and the more pleasing to His sacred Heart. That this is the very root and essence of all true perfection, is admirably illustrated by the example of Jesus Christ Himself. Nor is this to be wondered at, for He came down upon earth and took our flesh, not only to redeem us, but also that He might leave us a perfect model and a living example of the most exalted and sublime sanctity.

Jesus is holiness itself. He is the type and the spotless mirror of perfection. And, what is still more to the point, His perfection, just like our own, is measured by the completeness of His conformity to the Will of His Eternal Father in everything. Even before "He was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us," it had been foretold by the prophet, that He was coming on earth, in human form, TO DO THE WILL OF GOD. "Then said I: Behold *I come to do Thy Will, O God.* In the head of the book it is written of Me: that I should do Thy Will." (Hebrews x. 7-9.)

In the fulness of time, when He was actually born in the bleak stable on the cold winter's night, we are told by the Evangelist, that the heavens opened, and angelic voices were heard singing and praising God. And what was the burden of their song? "Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men." But to what kind of men? Not indeed to all men indiscriminately. No; only to "MEN OF GOOD WILL." That is to say, to men whose wills are in harmony with the infinitely perfect and all holy Will of God.

Years later, when our Divine Lord grew up, and entered upon His public life, He laid down the same principle and proclaimed the same truth, saying to His followers and disciples: "Behold, I seek, not my own will, but the will of Him that sent me." (John v. 30.) So great indeed was the stress He laid upon

this duty that He publicly declared that He would consider all such as practised it to be His nearest and dearest friends. "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father, who is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother." (Matt. xii. 50.) No wonder that St. John, with these words ringing in his ears, should cry out: "The world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof; but HE THAT DOTH THE WILL OF GOD ABIDETH FOREVER." (1 John ii. 17.)

This readiness on the part of Jesus Christ to carry out His heavenly Father's Will extended to everything, even to that which was most painful and difficult. Even when He knelt in the Garden of Olives and brought before His mind the most bitter Passion He was about to endure, He made no complaint. There is no doubt but that He knew and thought of the shameful betrayal of Judas, and of the false accusations that would be brought against Him, and of the sentence of death that would be passed. There is no doubt that He saw clearly, with His mind's eye, the inhuman scourging, the agonizing crowning with thorns, and the piercing of His extremely sensitive hands and feet, and all the other species of agony, ignominy, and humiliation that awaited Him, and there is no doubt but that His whole heart and soul were steeped in a bottomless ocean of misery and anguish. But, in spite of the most natural revulsion of His whole nature, and the unspeakable agony of His soul, which forced from Him the cry: "My soul is sorrowful, even unto death," He never flinched nor murmured, nor asked to be released, if it were not His Father's Will, but kept His human will ever in the most absolute subjection and conformity with the Will of His heavenly Father, saying merely: "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me; but NOT MY WILL, BUT THINE BE DONE."

The first portion of this prayer, *viz.*, "If it be possible, let this chalice pass away from me," was uttered in order that we might see and understand that His human nature was in very truth keenly sensitive to

the appalling agony of the martyrdom that awaited Him; while He added the second portion, *viz.*, "but not My Will, but Thine be done," to manifest to us the absolute conformity of His will with the Will of His heavenly Father, even under the most trying conditions, and His readiness to endure all things, even death itself for His sake. In this conformity we contemplate the most unmistakable mark of true perfection.

As our Blessed Lord practised perfection Himself, so He would have us practise it likewise. Though we shall never be called upon to suffer as Christ did, yet our sanctity is to be sought in choosing God's will rather than our own pleasure and satisfaction, and in willingly accepting such trials and crosses that He sees good to send us.

You no doubt remember, my dear brethren, how Jesus Christ on one occasion was asked by His disciples to teach them how to pray. "Lord, teach us how to pray, as John also taught his disciples." (Luke xi. 1.) Upon which He taught them the Our Father (Vide Matt. vi. 9), that exquisitely beautiful prayer, which we repeat many times a day. Now, there is one petition in that prayer which we may indeed say contains the whole secret of sanctity in a nutshell. It is the sentence: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." Whosover can use and repeat those words, and truly and sincerely mean what he says, has certainly learnt the direct way to Heaven. We may be in joy or in sorrow; in health or in sickness; in poverty or in affluence; in favor or in disfavor. But if at all times, when fortune frowns on us, no less than when it smiles, we can honestly cry out to God: "Thy Will be done," we may rest satisfied that we are on the right road to our Father's Home above.

Observe that in this petition we ask, not only that God's all holy Will may be accomplished, rather than our perverse and often wicked will, but we ask that it may be done by us, here on earth, *as it is done in Heaven.* That is to say, with the same readiness, the

same eagerness, the same promptitude and the same perfection with which the angels and saints in Heaven love to do it. "Thy will be done on earth, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN."

So soon as we have grasped the fundamental principle that Sanctity is nothing more than the taking possession of, and the appropriation (as it were) of, God's all holy Will, so that it becomes our very own, and the supreme rule and guide of our conduct, so soon shall we see very clearly that Sanctity lies well within the reach of every man, woman and child, whatever may be their condition, and whatever may be their occupations or their circumstances.

In the first place, to fulfil faithfully the ordinary duties of our state of life is to do God's Will, for His providence has placed us where we are. To carry on our common everyday work and toil, in His name, and for His sake, and to discharge all our appointed tasks, with the sole purpose of pleasing Him, without murmuring or complaint, is to have no other will but God's Will.

In the second place, it is essential that we should accustom ourselves to recognize the divine Will in all the events of life. So that, in all that chances to befall us, and in every trial, disappointment, sorrow and suffering that may cross our path, we may be able to say: "Blessed be Thy holy Will. Thy Will be done on earth, even as the blessed do it in Heaven."

You will at once realize from these remarks how God in His infinite mercy and love has been pleased to place the inestimable treasure of Sanctity within your reach. For whatever may be your profession or your occupation or your circumstances and surrounding, you may attain to true Sanctity, and so enter through the Golden Gates of Heaven and take your stand with the vast host of angels and saints before the Throne of God, there to live and to enjoy complete and absolute bliss for ever more.

Some foolish persons seem to imagine that Sanc-

tity consists in doing extraordinary things. But this is a profound and a most mischievous mistake. For it may consist in doing the most ordinary things, but doing them with extraordinary perfection. The lives of the vast majority of men are exceedingly commonplace, and their work most humdrum and uninteresting. And they are for the most part so situated that they cannot change their sphere of action, at least to any considerable extent. Yet they are all, without one solitary exception, called by God to holiness and perfection. It was not to a select few, but to all who would listen, that our Divine Master said: "Be ye holy even as your heavenly Father is holy." Hence, it follows that their perfection must be sought in the careful, regular and perfect discharge of their ordinary and customary duties. In order to become a saint we need not quit the world and fly into the desert, there to spend the rest of our days in mortification and penance. Nor is it necessary even to don the habit of a monk or a friar and to devote the whole of our time to prayer and contemplation. No; there have been saints, and great saints, in every walk of life, and if we ourselves do not reach perfection, it will be wholly and entirely our own fault. All have the power given to them. If few, and indeed very few, actually become saints, it is because very few have any real and practical and sustained desire to possess that pearl of great price. We have not the courage; we have not the zeal; we have not the ambition. We are blind and ignorant, and do not appreciate the value of the gift God is offering us. We are willing to labor and to deny ourselves for some earthly good. We know well what it is to toil and to spend ourselves for some purely temporal advantage, or for the sake of some miserable earthly prize; but we at once grow indifferent and lukewarm, when it is a spiritual and an eternal prize. How ashamed we should feel to see the manner in which worldlings will bestir themselves and endure endless pain for a temporal good, while we will scarcely move a little

finger, even though it be to lay hold of an eternity of delights.

Let us, at least, open the eyes of our soul and strive to see things as God in His infinite wisdom sees them. Life is hurrying us to the grave. We are already nearer the solemn Judgment Seat than when I began my discourse, so that we have no time to lose. Let us begin this very day. Then what shall we do? How shall we make a start? My answer is, all you have to do is to purify your intentions and to go about your usual days' work, with your mind fixed on God who is a witness of every secret notion of your heart, and with the one desire of carrying out His will in all things.

The great Cardinal Newman has told us in a few short and pithy lines what to do in order to lead a perfect life; if only you follow out his instructions you will, without any overwhelming difficulty, attain the desired end. Listen: "He is perfect, says His Eminence, who does the work of the day perfectly, and we need not go beyond this to seek for perfection. You need not go out of the *round* of the day. . . . If you ask me what you are to do to be perfect, I say, first: Do not lie in bed beyond the due time of rising; give your first thoughts to God; make a good visit to the Blessed Sacrament; say the Angelus devoutly; eat and drink to God's glory; say the rosary well; be recollected; keep out bad thoughts; make your evening meditation well; examine yourself daily; go to bed in good time, and YOU ARE ALREADY PERFECT." (Vide "Meditations and Devotions," page 382-3.)

Lay these encouraging words to heart and put the advice they contain into practice, and you will soon reach the longed-for goal.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Cultus of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Text:—"Thy seed, which is Christ."—(*From the Epistle of the Sunday.*)

THERE is a grace and beauty gilding every object that God has made. The mineral, the vegetable and the animal kingdoms, though all different, are nevertheless all clothed with beauty as with a garment. There is not a spar nor a flint that does not bear about it some traces of God's divine workmanship. There is not a flower that blooms, nor an insect that bathes its gauzy wings in the flood of golden sunshine, but speaks to us in its own wondrous way, of the love, the wisdom, and the beauty of its creator. As the inspired writer reminds us: "the heavens and the earth are full of His glory."

But, dear brethren, in the world around us, we meet but the shadow, as it were, of God's beauty: the mere pale reflection of His infinite perfection, dimmed and darkened and subdued, as it were, to suit our present feeble sight, which could not now bear a clearer view.

In order to obtain a more perfect image of God's loveliness it is necessary that we penetrate the distant heavens, and fix our gaze on those thrice-blessed spirits, whether angelic or human, that stand unceasingly before the great white Throne of the Omnipotent. We must contemplate the multitudes that no man can number, who bask eternally in His holy presence. Angels and archangels, pontiffs and confessors, saints and martyrs, all pure and spotless, and all reflecting, as in so many mirrors, something of the exquisite splendors of God; yet each one different from the rest. So inconceivably beautiful are they that even the very least, as we feast our eyes upon him, seems to have absorbed, in his own person, all possible

beauty. This at least would be the impression until, turning, we behold a saint of a yet higher and still nobler rank.

The sight of even the least of all Heaven's inhabitants blinds us and intoxicates us by reason of the intensity of his glory. Yet, in spirit, we still press onward and upward through rank after rank, and tier above tier, and choir above choir, amid an increasing and everdeveloping splendor, till at last we can gaze no more. We can no longer see, but yet we know, with absolute certainty, that far away beyond all other created beings, there is one, who is of all the very summit and the crown; one who stands on the extreme point of the dizzy pinnacle of creation; the first and the highest and the most resplendent of all mere creatures. I mean Mary the Immaculate, the ever Blessed Virgin. No tongue can fitly describe her beauty or publish her worth. She stands peerless, alone, and without a rival. Neither saint nor angel can compare with her in her marvelous prerogatives. In her presence, the beauty of even the Cherubim and Seraphim pales and wanes. She is more closely united to God than any other creature. She occupies a throne beyond the rest. In addressing God she uses a language that would sound foreign and strange and wholly out of place on any lips but her own—*i. e.*, the language that a loving mother uses when addressing the child of her womb. Yea; Mary can utter words, and with absolute truth, which none of the Principalities or Powers dare utter when addressing the King of kings and the Lord of lords. She can say to God Himself, to the Eternal Son, the Second Person of the adorable Trinity: "Thou art my beloved son, this day have I begotten thee; Thou art my child, and I am thy mother." For the selfsame divine Person, who was born of the Father, *from all eternity*, according to His *divine* nature, was born of her *in time*, according to His *human* nature. "Thy seed is Christ." The natures are different. The Person is the same; and that Person is God.

Then, can we praise her too much? Can we show her honor, or reverence, or love beyond her deserts? No! Not so long as we remember that she is a creature, and that she has received all that she has from the hands of God.

One not unfrequently hears objections against the Church of God, and against the practices and customs she approves of, and encourages. From the very nature of the case, such objections must necessarily be unreasonable and unsound; but some are more absurd than others. Now one of the most absurd is, that we Catholics show such extravagant love and honor to the Blessed Virgin, that we are in positive danger of wrecking and of obscuring the honor due to God alone.

When we hear such statements on the tongue of reasonable beings, we begin to wonder what sort of notion these objectors can have formed of God. We ask ourselves, in bewilderment, if they have ever formed to themselves an accurate idea of the nature and attributes of the Creator of the Universe. If they had, they would be perfectly well aware that there is nothing so unlike, nothing so impossible to confuse, as the Creator, on the one hand, and the creature, on the other. There is no contrast so great to be found between any two creatures, as actually exists between God and all creatures.

We Catholics, without exception, admit that Mary, however holy, however exalted, however privileged, is, after all, but a creature. Indeed, it is our special boast that she is so essentially, and so truly one of ourselves. Now, so soon as ever we recognize that one fact, no praise and no honors that we can give her can, for one moment, clash with the honor we give to God, or in any way compromise our position in regard to Him. For the two kinds of honor are not even on the same plane.

Between God and His creatures the distance is not merely immense and immeasurable, but it is literally and absolutely infinite. Not only is it impossible so

to honor a creature as to make it equal to God, but it is impossible even to institute a comparison between a creature and God. No comparison is so much as conceivable.

There is nothing really alike in the two beings—*viz.*, in the Creator and the creature. They are essentially different. In different creatures, we may discover qualities which differ from one another only in degree. But, between the attributes of God and those of His creatures, there is no mere difference of degree; the difference is in kind—in essence.

Indeed, there is not one single term, not one single adjective that we can apply indifferently to God and to man. Or if we do so apply it, through the sheer exigencies of language, we do not and can not apply it in the same sense. Thus alluding to some renowned saint, we may indeed say: "He is good." And we also say: "God is good." But the term "good," though the same in both cases, means one thing in the first case, and something totally different in the second. When I observe that "a saint is good" I speak of a quality, of something distinct from and added to his nature. When, on the contrary, I declare that "God is good," I make no reference to any quality. I speak of no attribute added to His nature. I speak of that which is His very essence. Goodness is not a disposition of God; nor a perfection possessed by God: no, *it is God.* Strictly speaking, God does not possess goodness; He is goodness. We can not say that God's "nature," "being" or "essence" is one thing, and His goodness another, since the two are but two names for one and the same thing. Goodness is His essence, not something He has received, as creatures receive, not something that He might divest Himself of, but something as uncreated, as eternal, and as infinite and as essential as Himself: in fact, it is but another name for Himself. The same may be asserted of all His other divine attributes, such as Wisdom, Love, Power, etc.

It is easy to see how this at once removes Him from

all possibility of comparison with His creatures. So immeasurably wide is the gulf that separates the Creator from the creature that no single fact can be predicated of the one, *in the same sense,* in which it is predicated of the other; this holds good of all, even of existence. We say: "God exists." We also say: "Man exists." But the meaning the word "exists" bears in the first sentence, is absolutely different to the meaning it bears in the second sentence. When we say: "God exists," we mean that He is self-existent: that He is independent; that He owes His being to no other; that, consequently He was never created: and that He contains within Himself the reason of His own Being. We assert, in one word, that GOD IS ALL THAT IS; and that He contains the plenitude of being, without any restriction or limitation. That nothing exists external to Himself which does not exist, and which has not eternally existed, in a much truer and higher and fuller and, of course, wholly transcendental manner, within Himself.

How can such an infinite Being be confused with any creature, however sublime and exalted?

As to the creature, my brethren, in the sense in which God exists, he does not exist at all. He has no virtue, no staying power within himself. He is, as compared to God, a miserable, unsubstantial nothing. He enjoys no more independent existence than a shadow thrown by the sun. The shadow lasts so long as the sun is pleased to shine. Not one moment longer. If the sun but hide its head for one brief moment, the shadow is gone. Yet, the shadow is less dependent upon the sun than we poor, feeble nothings are dependent on God.

This is equally true of the very highest as of the very lowest. Even the sublime and unparalleled splendor of the unapproachable Virgin Mother herself would vanish and melt utterly away were God to suspend His influence, in virtue of which alone she is what she is.

There is no stability, no permanence in any creature

apart from God. Without Him there *is* nothing, and there *can* be nothing. Hence, the Scripture reminds us that all things are before Him as though they were not. Who, realizing this, can run the slightest risk of confusing the Creator with the creature; or can be in any danger of offering to Mary an honor and an adoration that is due to God alone? The very notion is absurd.

No! If we honor Mary it is simply *as the work of His hands.* And if we honor her above all others, it is because she is the greatest work of His hands; the very masterpiece of the divine Artist. So again, if we have recourse to her in our troubles, if we appeal to her in our distress, if we confide in her amid our countless difficulties, dangers, and temptations, it is because we have such boundless trust in Him who gave her to us from the Cross, and who in giving her to us exclaimed: "Behold thy mother." Yes: We firmly hold that these words, uttered by the lips of Eternal Wisdom, and on such a solemn occasion, were not idle, empty, and vain words, expressive of nothing in particular, as some Protestants seem to infer, but words pregnant with meaning and rich in promise; and worthy of Him who used them. From the moment in which they were uttered we have seen in Mary our own true mother, and we acknowledge ourselves to be her loving and devoted children.

On this first Sunday of a month devoted to her feasts it is especially befitting that we should call to mind the position that Mary holds in the economy of divine grace. As the first woman had so large a share of responsibility in the fall of mankind, it was God's will that a woman should have a large share in the restoration of that same race to grace and favor. Adam, and not Eve, was the head of the human family, yet Eve's pride and disobedience led to Adam's sin and man's discomfiture. So, in the fulness of time, it was decreed that there should be a second Adam and a second Eve; and if the work of man's redemption was accomplished by the second Adam,

who is Christ, it was, in God's marvelous providence to be prepared for and initiated by the humility and the obedience and the ready, unquestioning faith of the second Eve, who is Mary. It was the words: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word" that brought God down to earth, and rendered Him incarnate in her virginal womb.

God has given Himself to us; but how? Through Mary. He has entered into the closest relationship with us, and has become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. But again I ask, how has this relationship been brought about? By His taking flesh in the womb of Mary. She forms the link between us and the incarnate Son of God. If He is our brother; if the Apostle, in inspired words, calls him "the eldest of many brethren," it is because he was as the Chruch reminds us each day in the Mass, "born of the Virgin Mary."

Our exceptional love for Mary springs from many sources. But we love her more than all other mere creatures, chiefly because God has commanded us to follow Him and to walk in His footsteps; "Learn of Me," "I am the way," etc. And He Himself, our model, loved her more than all. Yes! my brethren. If God bids us learn of Him, let us do so in downright earnestness. We will dispose our minds and hearts to obey. We will mold our conduct on His. What He hates, we will hate; what He approves, we will approve; what He honors, we will honor; what He loves, we too will love. If there be one whom He loves beyond others, we also will love such a one beyond all others. If among the multitudes of angels and saints above, there be one whom God has favored and exalted and honored beyond all the rest; one whom He has drawn closer to Himself, and bound to Himself by wholly exceptional and indissoluble bonds, then it is enough to tell us who this favored one is; and we will recognize God's choice, and give her a corresponding place of honor and of primacy in our own poor human hearts.

Is there such a one? Most assuredly. Enter the stable of Bethlehem. Consider the scene that there meets your eyes. Behold a virgin mother, with an infant on her knee. Who is this newly-born babe? It is God the infinite and the eternal. It is the Omnipotent, clothed in the rags of our humanity. It is the same God who, at the beginning cried out: "Let there be light," and light flashed out of darkness. It is He who, by a word peopled the heavens with its angelic throngs, and who holds in His hands the dread keys of life and of death. The Lord of Lords! The King of Kings! He "by whom kings reign, and the princes of the earth exercise their power." Yes! It is God made man: God rendered visible to human eyes. And who is the virgin that clasps Him so familiarly to her bosom? And what is her connection with Him? Ah! She is His mother. Out of all possible creatures He has selected her. He has been pleased to take His human body from her; to lay for nine months within the sanctuary of her womb: to be born of her; to seek His nourishment at her breasts—in short, to be, in very truth, her child.

Who else can claim a similar privilege? Will the greatest of celestial spirits, will the foremost of the Principalities or Powers, or the highest of the Seraphim or the noblest of the Cherubim dare to claim a like dignity? Is there one who can even share this honor with her? No! No! A thousand times, No! Mary alone can boast of the unparalleled distinction of being the mother of Jesus, the mother of the Second Person of the Adorable Trinity, the mother of God. Her position is unique before God; it is unique before the angels of Heaven; it is unique also in the Church here upon earth; and it should be unique in the mind of every sincere Christian. That position of itself is enough to determine her place at the head of all creatures. For surely, no mere subject can exalt himself above her who is not only "the *handmaid* of the Lord," but also the *mother* of the Lord. "Thy seed is Christ."

It is those only who are not of the true Church, who

deny her pre-eminence, and who seek to belittle her high dignity. Nor is the reason far to seek. She is the devil's great enemy, and therefore, the enemy of all who range themselves under his banner. Every heresy is a revolt from the truth. Every heresiarch is a rebel and cries out, as Satan did of old: "*non serviam*" (I will not serve), but to sympathize with Satan is to be out of sympathy with Mary. At the very beginning, God foretold the enmity that would ever subsist between the fallen Lucifer and her, who was destined to triumph over him. "I will place enmities between thee and the woman; and between thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in the wait for her heel." (Gen. iii. 15.) Heresy and unbelief are the very spawn of the devil, and therefore it is quite natural that there should be an unwillingness on the part of heretics to recognize her power; and that they should so fiercely attack Catholics for their boundless love of her. But this fact should spur us on to love her the more dearly, and to devote ourselves more faithfully to her service, and to trust her more fully and unreservedly. May she guard and protect us from every danger: may we live ever under her patronage in this world, and may we, by God's mercy, enjoy her society forever and forever in the world to come. Amen.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Text:—"Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added to you."—(*From the Gospel of the day.*)

THE attitude that many Catholics take up toward eternal life, and the rewards promised to them by our Divine Lord, is a most apathetic and a most ungenerous one. They seem to express themselves as willing to accept the divine recompenses, but only provided that it costs them nothing. They will even condescend to go to Heaven, and to enjoy for all eternity the felicity of the saints, but they must not be asked to exert themselves, nor to deny themselves in anything in order to get there. Of course, they prefer happiness to misery, and joy to sorrow, and they would sooner be in Heaven rather than in hell, but they are not prepared to pay any great price for the privilege.

In fact, they seem to forget that nothing is ever obtained without some exertion; and that all gain comes as the reward of labor. This is true even in the things of this world. Thus, although God's providence supplies the human race with food, it is only on condition that men labor and toil with the sweat of their brow. God has ordained that the earth shall provide bread. True; but before it will do so, it has to be plowed and harrowed, and its rough clods broken. Then the seed must be sown and be allowed to spring up and ripen; then the harvest must be reaped, and threshed, and gathered into barns, and ground into flour, and finally kneaded and baked. So is it with regard to clothing and raiment. God supplies all such needs, but He supplies them, if we may so express ourselves, only in the raw material. Before we can avail ourselves of it we must brace ourselves up to the performance of many a hard task. We must build factories and mills,

and spin and weave, and so prepare the fabric that it may serve to protect our limbs from summer's heats, or from winter's frosts. Even the very savage, who is satisfied to cover his nakedness with the rough fur and skins of the wild animals, is forced to bestir himself, and to manufacture spears and arrows, and to hunt and shoot, and face considerable risks before he can capture his quarry and rob the deer or the bear of his covering. Indeed, it is God's way to give us His gifts as a reward for our personal efforts, and to help those only who are ready to help themselves. But, if this be true of purely earthly and temporal things, it is equally and even more so of spiritual and eternal things. "The kingdom of heaven," the inspired writer reminds us, "suffereth violence, and it is the violent who bear it away."

Now, the Apostle St. Paul, in one of his Epistles, draws a contrast between the resolute manner in which worldly minded men labor for purely earthly treasures, and the listless manner in which we labor for those which are supernatural and eternal, and he shows us how we may learn a valuable lesson from them. "Everyone," he observes, "that striveth for the mastery, refraineth himself from all things. They, indeed, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible one." Look around upon the world at large, and you will find many an illustration of the text. Go into the great cities, the vast manufacturing towns, into the mills, stores, and seething hives of industry that cover the land. Travel over the surface of the globe, penetrate into the great centers of commerce, and contemplate the scene. Wherever man is found, wherever he settles down with his fellow men, we are stifled by the smoke of his factories, and we are deafened by the buzz and hum of his machinery, and distracted by the bustle and noise of his active, energetic and persevering toil. Or, stand by some railway station within the precincts of a great city, and watch the morning trains as they disgorge their thousands upon thousands of business men. See

them hastening off to their offices to begin their day's work. Stand by them in spirit, and watch them as the long weary hours of the day go slowly by. What are they doing? How are they employing themselves? Some are clerks, who have to sit perched up on office stools all day and write, and copy letters, and cast up figures, and keep accounts; some are buying or selling, bargaining and exchanging, some are at work on the Stock Exchange, or in the warehouses; some are occupied in professional duties, or are teachers and instructors. But whatever they are, they are full of earnestness and energy.

Yet the task the world lays upon them is not an easy one. They must leave their homes early, and their wives and families, and travel to town, and pass the greater part of the day in a close atmosphere, often amid unpleasant surroundings, and perhaps in a noisy, unhealthy neighborhood. They may be tired, weary, depressed, out of health, but it matters not; they must plod on till the day is done, and the shadows lengthen, and it is time to set out again for home, there to enjoy the brief rest that the night brings. There they refresh themselves and stretch out their weary limbs, and sleep till morning breaks, and so prepare themselves to start once more upon another day's work, very much like the last. And so, in one long monotonous round, the days go by, and weeks grow into months, and months into years.

Such is the fact. But how shall we explain it? Is it from choice? From pure love of work? Do men naturally love to rise early and to retire late? Do they prefer monotony to variety, work to recreation, duty to pleasure, the office to the home, the society of their employers to the company of their wife and children? No! They certainly do not. There is, and there must be some strong underlying motive to induce them to forego the pleasures of life and to lead laborious days. And what is that motive? It is for the sake of the wage. It is in view of what is promised them, when their daily task is done, that they will deny them-

selves and conquer sluggishness, and set their hands to honest work. Or, as St. Paul puts it, they deny themselves and "refrain themselves from all things, *that they may receive a corruptible crown.*"

Now, my brethren, the practical question that rises at once to our lips is this: If men will so deny themselves and so struggle and strive for the contemptible rewards that the world offers, how comes it that they are so slow and so lethargic in striving for those that are offered them by Almighty God? What the world offers them is but the meanest trifle compared to that which God offers them; yet the great mass of toilers, from the highest professional men down to the lowest mechanic or laborer, will do far more for time than they will do for eternity—far more for earth than they will do for Heaven.

Why is this? It can be only either because men do not believe, or because they do not reflect. With those outside the Church it may be owing, in great measure, to want of faith, but with us, who are Catholics and who do sincerely believe, it must be because we do not give the matter our serious consideration.

Let us then spend a few minutes to-day in contrasting the wages paid us by the world with the wages paid us by Almighty God. The first difference is to be found in their intrinsic value. What the world offers is material, earthly, perishable; but what God offers us is spiritual, heavenly and imperishable. The world will promise money, food, clothing, lodging, worldly pleasures; but God promises us riches so rare, pleasures so pure, and delights so keen and intense that nothing that has ever fallen within our present experience can compare with them. In fact, we have the assurance of the Holy Spirit himself, that "eye hath never seen, nor ear heard, nor mind conceived" the fulness and the completeness, and the supreme satisfaction arising from the recompense which God has in reserve for those who do His will. The pleasures which the world supplies, if they can be called real pleasures, are mostly of the lowest order. They are

pleasures which man enjoys in common with the beasts, such as food, and drink, and sensual delights, and sweet sounds, and pleasant scenes, and all that appeals to the senses. Or, even if there are some others of a slightly higher order, they are, at all events, all derived from finite and created things; whereas the delights of the just, which they will enjoy, so soon as they come into their inheritance, are derived from the contemplation and the possession of the infinite and the uncreated. Indeed, God Himself becomes our recompense. "Behold, I am thy reward, exceeding great." By how much God exceeds all creatures, by so much does the joy arising from His possession exceed all the joys arising from the possession of creatures.

In short, the wages offered us by God are infinitely higher than those which are offered us by the world, and can afford us immeasurably greater satisfaction. That is one reason why we should labor far more assiduously for God than for the world. Though most men do just the reverse. But this is not all. The honors, the riches, the delights bestowed by God are not only infinitely more precious, but they are infinitely more enduring. The wealth that we may acquire possession of here is uncretain—it may be robbed, lost, or dissipated. Or sickness may come and entirely deprive one of the capacity of enjoying it. I remember a very rich man who had beautiful estates, and a delightful garden, and a sumptuous palace, not a hundred miles from Rome. His friends used to revel in his gardens, and spacious rooms, and galleries, his statues and his paintings, but he was a martyr to the gout. While others were enjoying his hospitality, he would remain a prisoner upstairs in his bedroom, sitting on a chair, in great pain and unable to put his feet to the ground. The least of his hired servants working on the farm, yea, the very stable boys, whistling in the yard, were far happier than he! Such are the effects of mere worldly wealth. It cannot secure us real peace or happiness. And, even though a man

should remain well and strong, and capable of turning his riches to his own profit and pleasure, there is always a nasty, dark shadow that pursues him wheresoever he goes, and casts a gloom over all his doings. A shadow that tinges and tarnishes his most joyous hours, and that is the shadow of death. Take a prosperous merchant or a successful man of business who has lived for this world and spent his whole time gathering together a huge fortune. Perhaps he is just going to begin *really* to enjoy life: just going to have what is called a good time. He engages rooms in the best hotel in far off London, or Paris, or New York, and takes the train there. What happens? Perhaps he is murdered on the way; perhaps there is a smash, and he is cut to pieces; perhaps he is run over while walking to the hotel from the station. Such things do happen, and cannot be foreseen. What has he gained by all his riches? What has gold profited him? Are riches and success worth all the trouble and anxiety spent on them? Is it not much more worth our while to labor for heavenly treasures, which are secure and of which nothing can deprive us? A man who lives solely or chiefly for perishable things is a dastardly and unmitigated fool. The Holy Scripture draws us his portrait in a few simple lines. It represents him as addressing his own soul in the following harangue: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for thee for many years. Take thy rest, eat, drink, and make good cheer. But God said to him: 'Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee!'" (Luke xii. 19, 20.) Of course a rich man may be a good man, and there have been even saints who, though exceedingly rich, were yet poor in spirit. But I am speaking here of men who *attach themselves to earthly gains*, and who are so intent upon material wealth and the pleasure that wealth yields, that they care little or nothing for the spiritual wealth that God offers them and neglect their duties to their Divine Master, in order to indulge themselves more freely and more completely in worldliness, dissipation, and amusements.

Of these and such as these the Holy Scripture has left us an awful and terrifying picture. It says: "Their little ones go out like a flock, and their children dance and play. They take the timbrel and the harp and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They speed their days in wealth, and in a moment they go down to hell!" (Job xxi. 11.)

Such is the uncertainty and the insecurity of all earthly joys and human delights.

But the gifts of God are not merely more secure and more certain, but they possess another quality which raises them infinitely above all that this world can give us. In a word, they are eternal.

In this world earthly possessions are, as we have seen, most uncertain; but let us suppose an exceptional case. Let us take the case of a man who is not only enormously rich, but who never has a day's sickness to interfere with his enjoyment, who succeeds in making most profitable investments, and who remains prosperous and fortunate throughout a long career extending, let us say, over eighty or nintey years. It is an exceptional case. Never mind. We will suppose such a case. Now, I want to ask you: How will that man feel when he draws on toward the end of his life? When life is slipping away from him, when he knows that his strength is going, and that he is breaking up. When the most skilful physicians declare they can do nothing more for him; when the natural heat of the body falls lower and lower, and the clammy sweat of death stands out in great beads from every pore? His eighty years of pleasure are over. His wealth, and influence, and high-sounding titles, his servants and horses, his carriages and coats of arms are things of the past. They afford him no comfort, no consolation, no assurance.

And what are eighty or a hundred years, when compared to eternity? Nothing! They form no part of eternity. They are but as a moment. We may take them, and multiply them, and keep adding and adding to them till we are weary and our brain refuses to

labor any longer, but we shall find that however much we may multiply eighty years, we shall never reach, or even approach, eternity; and yet there are some men foolish enough to labor for the empty joys of a brief life, rather than for the supreme joys of a life without end. What could be more unreasonable or silly?

Suppose some powerful prince were to approach a poor man and address him in this way: "Now, my poor man, I will make you an offer. If you will do a little easy work for me, and just behave yourself decently for one short day of twelve hours, I will make you rich and prosperous for fifty years. Nay, I will make you a still better offer. If you will be honest and industrious and work at the simple task I will give you to do *during the space of one single hour,* I will give you everything you desire for *fifty years,* and I will take you into my own house, and you will be treated as my son, and I will have my servants to wait on you, and my carriages at your service." What would you say? Well, you would be inclined, firstly, to doubt the sincerity of the offer. You would ask: "Do I understand you aright? Am I to have fifty long years of such delight in exchange for one short hour of easy work?" And again the prince would assure you that it is so. Well, you would, of course, accept such terms with the greatest gratitude and delight. Yet, this is nothing compared to what God offers us. What is one brief hour when compared to a period of fifty years? Well, no doubt there is a great difference. But it is nothing like the difference that exists between eighty or even a hundred years and eternity.

Multiply one hour by a few thousand, and it will soon equal fifty years; but one may multiply a hundred years by thousands, and hundreds of thousands, and millions, and it will never equal eternity. Fifty years soon comes to an end; but after we have multiplied fifty by five hundred or five thousand, or five millions, or by as many millions as there are grains of

sand, and have come to the last of them, we shall still be at the very beginning of eternity.

Yet God promises us an eternity of exqusite delights in reward for a few years of virtue and honesty, and yet we hesitate and falter. In fact, many deliberately refuse it, and prefer a moment's delight followed by an eternity of pain, to a moment's pain followed by an eternity of delight.

The foolish, the thoughtless, the worldlings may laugh at the earnest God-fearing and law-abiding Catholic *now,* but that laugh will change into a howl of remorse and disappointment when death comes, and they see the heavens opening to receive him, while they are cast out into the exterior darkness and descend into the infernal regions, there to suffer forever in punishment of their sins.

Let us, in God's name, arouse ourselves before it is too late, and resolve to live honestly and purely. The years are rapidly passing, and we are being borne along, but whither? Whither, my brethren? Well, into eternity. But there are two eternities; there is an eternity of pleasure and an eternity of sorrow. Toward one or the other we are hastening with lightning-like speed. Yet, we scarcely deem it worth our while to inquire "toward which?" Oh! truly, "the number of fools is infinite." Let us, at all events, not be of the number. Let us rather resolve so to live and so to act that we may be numbered amongst the just, and that our portion may be among the saints in the eternal glory.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Thought of Death

Text:—"Behold! a dead man was carried out."—(*From the Gospel of the day.*)

THERE are few things that so arrest our attention in this world as the sight of death. When moving through a big city, amid the gay throngs of busy people, and listening to the joyous sounds of human intercourse, interspersed with shouts of laughter and the voices of street singers and merry-makers, suddenly to meet a funeral cortege, and the dismal black hearse, as one turns a corner, gives one quite a shock. The sight of the coffin, with the silent, insensible corpse lying within, seems to jar upon us and to be strangely out of keeping with the bright and animated scene around. It lifts us, for a moment at least, from the amusements and interests of earth, and sets us thinking of another world, toward which we are all hastening, and impresses us with a strong sense of the transient nature of all things here below.

Nothing teaches us such a lesson, or compels us so to enter into ourselves as the contemplation of the sepulchre. Even the most violent temptations lose their force and spend themselves in vain upon a man whose eyes are ever fixed on the grave and the charnel house. The Holy Spirit Himself assures us of the efficacy of this solemn thought, and prescribes it as a preservative against sin. "In all thy works, remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin." (Eccles. vii. 40.)

Let us then take this as the subject of this morning's discourse, and strive to learn the valuable lessons that it teaches us. To make our task all the more impressive, we will divide the subject into two parts. In the first part we will consider five points, which are abso-

lutely *certain;* and in the second part, we will consider four points, which are equally *uncertain.*

1. The first undeniable truth concerning death is its inevitableness! I must die. Though I may be in the best of health at the present moment, and though I may feel young and strong and vigorous, yet I know that a time will come, when my strength will wane, and when the color will vanish from my cheeks, and my eyes will grow dim and my ears hard of hearing. The plain fact is that we are all under sentence of death. We have long since been judged and condemned to die, on account of sin and rebellion. "*Statutum est omnibus hominibus semel mori;*" "It is appointed unto all men once to die." (Hebr. ix. 27.) *It is appointed.* That is to say, it has been decreed and determined. But by whom? By God. By the supreme Judge. There is no way out of it. In these days men have become very sceptical; they are ready to deny everything. They will deny the immortality of the soul; they will deny the existence of God; they will even go so far as to question the freedom of their will, and even their own personal existence. But there is one thing that no one has the hardihood to deny or to call into question, and that is the certainty of death. All things remind us of that terrible reality. I look around, and on every side I see the ranks of my friends and acquaintances daily thinning. How many there are, with whom I used to hold sweet intercourse, and whose lives seemed intimately interwoven with my own, but who have now been hurried off by the hand of death! I cannot take up a daily paper, without meeting a long list of names of those who have died since yesterday. One was drowned, another was slain in battle, while a third, falling from on high, broke his neck. This one was smashed up in a railway accident, that one was carried off by the plague, and another was murdered in his sleep. Thus, in one way or another, all sooner or later, come to their end. Every time we pass by a cemetery, we are reminded of our fate, and that we too must full soon be laid beneath

the earth. "To-day for me" the buried dead seem to say, "but to-morrow for thee." It matters not what our position or occupation may be; for neither wisdom nor influence, nor wealth nor station can stave off the levelling hand of death. As the poet Grey so truly reminds us:

> The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
> And all that beauty, all that wealth, e'er gave,
> Await, alike, the inevitable hour:—
> The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

This then, is the first solemn truth that I must hold ever clearly before me. It is not enough to admit it, and then to dismiss the thought as interfering with one's happiness. No, one must strive to realize it and bring it home to oneself, so that one may arrange one's time and live one's life, by its light. It is only in that way, that it will bear upon our conduct, and keep us from falling into sin. First truth:—I must die.

2. The second great truth that I have to learn concerning Death is that I must die soon. While we are in the enjoyment of robust health, we are too apt to imagine that Death is a long way off. We flatter ourselves that there is plenty of time, before the summons, and that we need not now trouble ourselves about the matter. But time is hurrying by; the years are swiftly passing, and in an incredibly short period we shall be asked to give an account of our stewardship. What, after all are ten, twenty or even fifty years, compared to eternity? They *seem* long, when we are looking forward to them. But how short they appear, when they have slipped away. Let a man of thirty-five or forty look back. Let his consider how these thirty-five or forty years have gone by, like a shadow. And then reflect that so also will it be with the years that have yet to come. Death is ever at our heels; ever dogging our footsteps. Every day, every hour, every minute brings it a step nearer. It is nearer now than when I began to speak; it will be nearer still, when I have done speaking. Now; what is always ap-

proaching must soon arrive. A courier, who never pauses to rest or to take breath; a train that stops at no station on the way, but continues at full speed, day and night, soon reaches its destination. So is it with death. *Mors non tardat:* Death does not tarry—(Eccl. xiv. 12) says Holy Writ. I once attended an old man of eighty-six years of age. He had enjoyed an exceptionately long life; far beyond the majority of mortals. Yet, when I approached his death-bed, and softly informed him that the doctors said that he was dying, and had better receive the last Sacraments, he exclaimed, as though he could hardly believe me: "Dying? Dying? What! So soon?" To those who stood around, he seemed to have had a very long and eventful career, but to him, as he lay there, on the brink of eternity, the whole of those eighty-six years seemed but a short moment. I shall never forget the intonation of surprise in his voice, as he looked up at me, almost incredulously, and asked: "What! So soon? So soon?"

Yes, my brethren, Death will soon come to carry us away to the great Judgment Seat of God, and we shall do well to have everything ready for our departure.

3. The third great truth we have to bear in mind is that when Death comes, it separates us at once, and forever, from all things here below. We are now bound to the earth by a thousand cords. We have our family and our friends, our worldly interests and ambitions. We are connected, by business relations and by social ties, to all sorts of people. Then we also have our property and estates, our horses and carriages or motors, our favorite books, pictures, household furniture, and our jewels and precious gems and ornaments, and a thousand and one things, to which we are more or less attached, and in which we take a certain pride. Objects which we call our own; which we show to our friends with considerable pleasure; and which we make use of to our own satisfaction and delight. Then while we are gloating over all these, Death

suddenly appears, and with a single stroke of the sword, as it were, separates us from them all. Indeed, we are all more or less faithfully represented by the man spoken of in the Gospel, who said within himself: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years to come; so take thy rest, and eat and drink and make good cheer. But God said to him: Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee; and to whom shall those things go which thou hast provided?" (Luke xii. 19, 20.) That is to say, we are all too much attached to temporal things, and should learn to withdraw our affections from them before Death's pitiless fingers tear them away from our grasp, in spite of ourselves.

The Apostle reminds us that we are but pilgrims and strangers on earth, and that we have not here a lasting city, and should fix our eyes on our eternal and true Home above. Yet how few of us seem to lay his words to heart! So again, our Lord Himself urges us to lay up our treasures, not in this world, but in Heaven, for there the moth consumeth not, nor does the rust destroy, nor do thieves break through and steal. Yet, in spite of His admonition, our only anxiety seems to be to surround ourselves here with mere temporal possessions, which we may possibly carry along with us as far as the grave, but not one step further; for "as we brought nothing into this world, so most certainly we shall take nothing out of it." The solemn thought that Death will strip us absolutely naked of all those things in which we trust, and of which we make so much, and that it will separate us from them forever, should teach us to despise them, and to estimate them at their proper worth, and to prize those only that will endure for all eternity, and which will accompany us even beyond the grave. I mean our good works, our prayers and sacrifices, our penances and alms deeds, all of which will appeal with wondrous force, on our behalf, before the throne of God, and secure for us countless favors and blessings throughout our limitless future. O! my brethren, fol-

low not the foolish example of mere worldlings; but carry out the advice of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Let others waste their time in heaping up worldly riches; let others spend their brief life in amassing perishable goods! We, at all events, will devote all our efforts and strain every nerve to gain possession of spiritual and supernatural goods of which nothing can ever rob us, but which will endure, as long as God is God.

4. The fourth important truth concerning Death is that it fixes, once and for all, our eternal destiny. Change is a characteristic of this life, but permanency of the next. In our present state, the very worst man may yet repent and amend, and reach a high place in the Kingdom of Heaven, while the holiest may fall into sin, and be eventually lost. So long as life endures, we can never feel absolutely confident about the fate of any one. But this state of uncertainty endures only for the space of the present life. So soon as ever Death comes no further change is possible. If Death surprise a man in a state of unrepented mortal sin, his case is hopeless. Hell with its quenchless flames is the only possible abode for such as he. If, on the other hand, he be in a state of grace, when he departs from this world, then he is absolutely secure of his eternal reward. Though man may oscillate between the two states, during life, when Death comes it puts the seal upon his soul, and fixes its condition beyond any further alteration. If the soul is sent to Hell, in Hell it will be imprisoned throughout eternity; and if it is sent to Heaven, then in Heaven it will rejoice forever more. As Death robs the damned of all hope of escape from their torments, so Death frees the Blessed from all fear of ever forfeiting the ecstatic happiness of the Beatific Vision. From this consideration we clearly appreciate the vital importance of doing our utmost to secure a holy and blessed death.

5. And this is all the more necessary, because we must remember, in the fifth place, that Death comes but once. A mistake made in the affairs of this world

may often be set right. If we fail once, we may be more successful another time. If I am plucked at an examination, I may go up again, and perhaps succeed. If I lose my fortune, I may with enterprise and industry accumulate another. Should my wife die, even then I may console myself with another. In fact, there are few mistakes or losses which I may not, at least in some measure, remedy and redress. But any mistake in the manner of my Death can never be remedied. To make a bad end is to fail utterly and irretrievably. It is to lose God, to forfeit Heaven and to be delivered over to the torturer without hope and without reprieve. Let us take that tremendous truth to heart, and do all in our power to ensure a truly holy and Christian end.

So far we have been considering the certainties of Death. Now it is time to turn to the uncertainties. These regard (1) the Time; (2) the Place; (3) the Manner; and lastly (4) the Circumstances.

6. I must surely die. True. But when? Will it be to-day or to-morrow, or in twenty or thirty years hence? I know not. God alone knows. This is a secret, which God, in His wisdom, keeps locked up in His own mind. He purposely leaves the hour unknown, in order that I may be careful, and live each day as if the very next hour might be my last. "Watch and pray," He says, "because you know not the day nor the hour, when the Son of man may call upon you to give an account of your stewardship." There is nothing concerning which we know so little as the precise date which God has fixed for our Death. How often our best grounded expectations are falsified! How often the frail and the sickly live on, while the strong and healthy are struck down, without warning. How often the old man of eighty or ninety is found to outlive his children and his grandchildren? One is called away at the very commencement of his career. Another is given time to mature and to enter upon his profession, and is then taken away. Others reach decrepitude and old age, before the summons comes.

Though all are certain to quit this life, the hour of their demise is wisely kept from them, so that they may be ever on their guard.

7. If the time is uncertain, so is the place. Who shall say where he will lay down his life? Will it be on the battlefield, or in his own quiet home? Will his summons come to him on land or on the sea, at home or abroad, in the town or in the country? He has not the remotest idea. It rests with God alone to determine all these points. So far as man is concerned, he knows nothing.

8. The third great uncertainty is the Manner of our Death. Shall we die suddenly, or after a long sickness? Death is frequently preceded by a timely warning. That is to say, it begins by a slight sickness. This gets more serious, and we summon the physician. Instead of improving, we find ourselves growing steadily weaker. The physician plys his art in vain. At last he looks grave, and shakes his head, and expresses his fear that no human skill can save us. He advises us to arrange our affairs, to make our will, and to give our final instructions; and to send for the priest. And thus, we are able perhaps to strengthen ourselves for the last journey, by the Sacraments and the last consoling rites of the Church. When this is possible, it is an immense satisfaction for the dying man, for his relatives and his friends, and for all concerned. But such a grace is not always accorded. Very many are hurried before the great Throne of God without a moment's warning. In these days especially, sudden deaths are exceedingly common. Not only are fatal accidents of daily occurrence, in the street, on the railway, and at sea, but even within the apparently safe enclosure of our own homes. How many have retired to rest, seemingly in the best of health, who have passed away during the night? How many have succumbed to a sudden seizure, or have fallen down in an apoplectic fit, and died without recovering consciousness. Do we not hear of preachers dying in the pulpit or at the Altar steps? Many a feast, many a

joyous celebration has had to be cancelled, or at all events, put off, because of the sudden and wholly unforeseen death of a near relative. All these are instances which remind us of the terrible suddenness of the call to Judgment, and the great necessity of being always ready to meet the Judge of the living and of the dead. For in these cases, there is no time for repentance; no time to make a good confession; no time to receive the administrations of the priest; no time to do anything whatever to put ourselves in the dispositions, in which we would wish to be found, at such a tremendous crisis of our lives.

9. Fourthly, all the circumstances of our Death are uncertain. Shall we die among friends, or among strangers? Shall we be within reach of the Sacraments, or far away from every church? It is impossible for us to say. We know not. Some have deliberately put off their repentance to the end of their life; promising themselves that they would be reconciled with God at the hour of their death, but not before. But they were not given the chance on which they foolishly reckoned, for they fell down dead in the street, or were run over by a motor, or passed away to hell in their sleep. Others again, who counted on a death-bed repentance, were also disappointed in their hopes, because they were not in a fitting state to receive absolution. Though they may have lain for weeks on a bed of suffering, yet they delayed to send for the priest. If this was suggested, the answer was always: "Not just yet! Not to-day! To-morrow! A little later; when I feel a little stronger." And so the precious moments passed. When, at last, the priest was summoned, he could do nothing. He arrived too late. The sick man was dying. True. But he was scarcely conscious. He could not recall his sins. His mind was wandering. He could not speak nor even think coherently. He became delirious. O! Fatal procrastination! He had lost his chance. He had played fast and loose with his soul, and now he is lost. He trusted in luck. He staked all on a mere chance. He

leaned upon "this broken staff of a reed" (Isaias xxxvi. 6), which failed him utterly. So that he sunk into hell. No man can cheat Almighty God. If he refusse to confess his iniquities while the chance is given him, if he will not make use of the means, while God offers them to him, if, on the contrary, he presumptuously assigns a time when he will make his peace with his Maker, he may find, when it is too late, that he is reckoning on an uncertainty. In punishment of his presumption, God may not afford him the dispositions, the vigor, the clearness of brain, and the consciousness requisite for a good, sincere confession and heart-felt contrition.

Thus, he may die in his sins.

When we consider what is at stake, we dare not run any risks. Heaven and Hell are quivering in the balance. The step into the next world, which we are about to take, is irrevocable and final; and will determine our position and condition for all eternity. If then we are wise, we shall listen to and act upon the counsel of our Blessed Lord, who says: "Watch and pray, for you know not the day nor the hour." The only safe method is to be always in a fit state to appear before our Judge; for "Death cometh, as a thief in the night." Weigh well these inspired words. Death comes, *as a thief*. How does a thief come? Does he announce his approach? Does he send a messenger before him, to put men on their guard? Does he arouse their suspicions, or attract their attention? No! A thief steals along noiselessly, with padded foot-step, and makes no sound. So that he is on us before we are aware of his approach. The Holy Ghost tells us that Death comes in a similar manner. "Death comes as a thief, in the night." Observe "in the night;" that is to say, when men are not observant; when they are not thinking; when they are asleep, unsuspicious and over-confident.

Can we afford to allow Death to surprise us in this way? Most decidedly not. Yet, the only means of avoiding such a calamity is to be forever on our guard;

and never for a moment to relax our vigilance. Watch and pray, is the exhortation of Jesus Christ; and again and again do we repeat: Watch and pray, for in that alone will our security be found, both for time and eternity.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Humility

Text:—"He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."—(*From the Gospel of the day.*)

AS Almighty God detests and denounces the soul-destroying vice of pride, so in a corresponding degree does He love and favor its opposite, *viz.*, the truly beautiful virtue of humility.

His predilection for this virtue is manifested in many ways. In the first place it is the humble of heart whom He selects in order that He may make them the special depositories of His supernatural favors and graces and blessings, according to the assurance of the apostle. "God resisteth the proud, but to the humble he giveth grace." (1 Peter v. 5.) And the reason of this seems sufficiently obvious. God knows that to grant special privileges or powers to such as are already puffed up, and who are wont proudly to attribute to themselves what they receive from God, would be but to pour oil on the flames, to increase their conceit and vanity, and greatly to aggravate the weight of their responsibility; therefore in His mercy He reserves His best gifts for the humble; that is to say, for those who may be trusted to attribute nothing to themselves, but to refer everything they have to its true source, *viz.*, the Eternal Father above, from whom every good gift proceeds.

God indicates His strong approval of humility also in another manner—by treating the humble and lowly with a greater and more intimate familiarity than others; and by conversing with them as a friend with friends. It is above all to the humble that God opens out the treasures of His wisdom; often, as it were, laying bare the supernatural truths and mysteries of His

kingdom in the hours of prayer and heavenly contemplation. "I confess to thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth!" exclaimed our Divine Master, "because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and *hast revealed them to the little ones.*" (Matt. xi. 25.) That is to say, to those who are mean and despicable in their own eyes.

The fulfilment of these words is witnessed in the lives of the saints. How often it is found that without human learning, and without study or application or physical effort of worldly opportunity poor and simple souls display a knowledge of God and an insight into some of the most abstruse and difficult questions of theology, which astonish and dumbfound the profoundest and most famous students and professors. The Holy Spirit illuminates their minds and communicates a knowledge which years of patient thought could never purchase. The Franciscan lay brother, St. Didacus, to take a single instance, could neither read nor write; and being vowed to poverty, could bestow no alms; yet rich and poor flocked to him for advice, and even the very beggars used to say, that "this poor man's words are worth more than other men's gold."

God manifests His love of meek and humble souls also by His practice of selecting them, in preference to all others, for the accomplishment of His greatest designs. The glorious Apostle St. Paul was so strongly impressed by this fact, that he points it out in his own inimitable language to the Corinthians. In his First Epistle he tells them, as though to instill into their hearts a love of this difficult virtue, that "The foolish things of the world hath God chosen that he may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen that he may confound the strong; and the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible hath God chosen, and the things that are not, that he might bring to naught things that are, that no flesh should glory in his sight." (1 Cor. i. 27-29.)

Just as He chose for His disciples and apostles men of mean birth and low extraction, and appointed these

ignorant fishermen to convert the world, and to subjugate nations and peoples to His rule, so He still, even in these days, makes use of men who are weak and miserable in their own eyes to further His interests, to carry out His will, and to be the instruments of His mercy.

O! dear brethren, if we are sincerely anxious to do any real work for God; if we yearn to cooperate with Him in the divine task of saving and of sanctifying souls, there is no more important work before us than to grow daily more and more in the spirit of humility and in the honest contempt of self. We need never hope to be selected for God's greatest and noblest purposes; we need never aspire to become fit instruments in His hands, until He can find in us a deep and thorough distrust of ourselves. "The things that are contemptible hath God chosen, and the things that are not, that He may bring to naught the things that are."

A further consideration, dear brethren, to urge us to practise this virtue arises from the fact that God has, in His wisdom, decreed that the path of humility should ever be the high road, and the royal road to true and eternal glory. There is indeed no route that leads so directly and so securely to the highest honor and happiness as the route of humility. As it is true that "the first shall be last," so, on the other hand, our Lord assures us that "the last shall be first." (Matt. xx. 16.) "Humility goeth before glory" (Prov. xv. 33), says the Scripture; and again: "He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble." (Luke i. 52.) "Be you therefore humbled under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in the time of visitation." (1 Peter v. 6.) It is written that on one occasion the disciples, who were as yet not far advanced in this virtue, began to contend amongst themselves as to who should be most exalted in the Kingdom of Heaven. The matter, apparently, was referred, for solution, to Jesus Christ. His answer is deserving of special attention, and is of a most touching kind. "Calling unto him a little child, he set him

in the midst of them, and said: . . . whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. xviii. 2, 4.) Thus showing them that a meek, simple, confiding and lowly nature has more of Heaven in it than any other; and that those are often the greatest in reality who are themselves the most utterly unconscious of it.

What was the special virtue beyond all others that won for our Blessed Lady the unapproachable dignity and glory of giving birth to the Son of God, and of reigning forever as queen of Heaven and of earth? Surely, it was her unparalleled and most profound humility. "He hath regarded," says the inspired writer, "the *humility* of his handmaid." Then comes the consequence. "Behold, from henceforth, all generations shall call me blessed." Similarly, the measure of our own advance in the acquisition of this virtue will be the measure of the outpouring of God's grace upon us. According to our progress in humility will God accord us a larger and larger share of His favors? For, if it be true that "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be humbled," so it is equally true that "whosoever humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Matt. xxiii. 2.)

Very many further advantages are connected with the exercise of this beautiful virtue, but as neither time nor space suffice to enumerate them all, let us conclude our discourse by directing our attention to the influence which humility exercises over our present well-being and happiness. Its direct fruits, which may be tasted and enjoyed even here on earth, are interior calm, peace, contentment and solid happiness. This, in fact, our divine Lord is careful to point out in that oft-repeated text: "Learn of me, for I am meek and *humble* of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls." Yes! Humility learnt at the feet of Jesus Christ; learnt with His sacred examples before our eyes, means true and solid peace, and "rest to our souls," such as the world knows not of, and such as the world can not give.

"If," remarks a great spiritual writer, "you find a man who is always cheerful and content, you may rest assured you have found a humble man." And this is even according to reason, since a humble, unambitious heart is so easily satisfied.

One profoundly sensible of his sinfulness and unworthiness has no desire for the admiration and esteem of others. So far from feeling wounded and hurt when such sentiments are withheld, he rejoices. Even if he be ill-treated by the world, and despised, he merely thinks he is getting what is his due, and he thanks God for it. So far from being distrubed or dejected by reason of the slights and affronts, or even the direct insults of the world, he is rather astonished that people treat him with so much consideration, and put up with him so readily; in fact, he persuades himself always that he receives more kindness than he deserves, and is proportionally grateful and satisfied.

If he be neither spoken of, nor praised, nor selected for offices of trust, nor for posts of honor and responsibility; yea, though he sees others, perhaps younger than he is, advanced, and himself passed by and neglected and made nothing of, he still takes no offence, nor does he feel in any way aggrieved, since he honestly deems himself unworthy and unfit for such positions, and has long since made up his mind that no place is half so suitable and so fitted for him as the very lowest and least of all.

Even when God tries him in more direct ways, and tempts him, as He tempted Abraham, Job, Tobias and others, with disease, or poverty, or persecution, or all three, he still judges all these things as far less than his sins deserve, while his whole heart overflows with gratitude to God, whose infinite goodness causes Him to chastise His erring child here, rather than in the dread hereafter. If the "humble of heart" are ever serene and joyous, the proud, on the contrary, are never really in peace. They have their punishment even on earth; and carry within them the seeds of dis-

content. They may be rich and independent, they may occupy high positions, but in spite of all, they have always some grievance or some complaint. Like the stormy, restless sea, played on by every wind of Heaven, their hearts are ever in a chronic state of strife and contention; the least adverse circumstance suffices to trouble and disturb them. Seeking honors and distinctions, and setting their hearts upon earthly trifles, they are rendered miserable when they fail to secure them. If some expected decoration or coveted position is refused them, they are filled with bitterness and resentment. Yea, even more; even if through pure inadvertence or ignorance their social rank or position is not recognized; or if they are omitted from the lists of invited to this or that dinner party, *conversazione,* or ball, they are at once mortally offended and seek only how they may best wreak their vengeance on the unhappy, though perhaps quite unconscious, offender. In fine they are ever in trouble and disquietude because their pride makes them as sensitive to every offense, whether real or imaginary, as the eye is sensitive to every particle of floating dust or wandering smut that may chance to alight upon it.

We have an instance of what I mean in the case of Aman, mentioned in Holy Writ. With the exception of the King himself, he occupied the highest position in the great Persian Empire, and possessed immense wealth and fortune. Yet in spite of these seeming advantages, he grew heavy at heart, and utterly dejected because a certain Jew did not bow down before him and offer him homage as he passed. Though every other Jew was obsequious and reverential, it mattered not. That this one individual should refuse to do him public honor was quite enough to drive all peace out of his proud heart, to stir up every evil passion, and to induce him, in violation of all justice, to plot against the welfare, not of this one Jew in particular, but of the entire Jewish people. The incident is too well known to need more than a passing reference here; and I have mentioned it merely to illustrate how a

proud, conceited man is a source of perpetual trouble and pain to himself.

How utterly different it is with the humble. Words which touch his reputation, or which reflect upon his good name, do not affect him. Should he be spoken well of and commended, he has a smile of pity for the men who are deceived as to his true character; if he is spoken ill of and reproached, he is quite content that others should come to form of him an opinion that he has long since formed of himself. In fact, there is nothing in the heart of a humble soul to interfere with the reign of heavenly peace. Such a one is free from the anxieties which human criticisms and ill-natured judgments cause others to feel, and he goes his way unmoved by the slights and animadversions of a censorious world.

Further; humility attracts countless friends, and wins the hearts of all. Who, indeed, can help loving a person who always insists upon preferring others to himself; who takes no offense when others are honored instead of himself, and who, instead of envying others, rather rejoices at their advance, and wishes them yet higher honors, and cheerfully resigns to them whatever seems best and most desirable?

Thus, even in this present life, God rewards the humble by filling their hearts with an interior peace and joy which the world can not give nor yet take away. "*My* peace I give to you, *my* peace I leave to you." (John xiv. 27.) Yes; it is in very truth the peace of Christ: a peace which endures undisturbed in spite of the storms and tempests that rage without, and in spite of the strife and enmities and bitterness incidental to our present state.

Our last thought is, how are we to obtain humility? So great a treasure is indeed worthy of a strong and persevering effort. It is a pearl of great price, for the sake of which we should be ready to sacrifice all we have.

Now, the first means of securing it is to place before us the example of Christ Himself: to contemplate

His unapproachable meekness and lowliness, and then to form our character, in so far as it is possible, according to His. This is His own advice: "Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart."

Secondly, to call frequently to mind, and to get thoroughly persuaded of the fact, that humility is the only proper and suitable attitude for a creature; being really nothing more than the practical and honest acknowledgment that *we* are what we are, and that *God* is what He is. It is the daily and practical application to our ordinary life of two undeniable and simple facts. Firstly, that God is all in all. And secondly, that we, of ourselves, have nothing, can do nothing, and are nothing.

Another aid to humility is the consideration of the innumerable advantages that attend it, both in this world and in the next, and the marvelous graces and blessings it attracts to itself.

A fourth means is, of course, to lift up our voices before the throne of God day and night and to implore Him "Who knows the clay of which we are formed," to remold our proud hearts, and to give us hearts more like to His divine heart.

But of all means of acquiring humility, the last means, which I shall now suggest, appears to me to be the most important and the more ready and efficacious, and that is to practice humility. We must love—not only humility—but, above all, we must love humiliations. We must not shrink from the occasions as they arise. We must not strive to avoid that which will humble us; that which will make us feel our unworthiness; that which will bring home to us our shortcomings, our mistakes, our niggardliness, our selfishness, and the rest. There is no more direct route to humility than the route of daily and cheerfully borne humiliations.

Love humiliations, seek humiliations, and you will soon be humble.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Commandment of Love

Text:—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."—(*From the Gospel of the day.*)

IT may seem strange, at first sight, that a doctor of the Law, whose business it is to instruct others, should not know the answer to the question, which he proposed to our Blessed Lord. But the simple fact is that, there was much doubt, among the Jews, in the time of Christ, concerning this point. Many contended that the first and by far the most essential duty, incumbent on the true followers of God, was to offer the Sacrifices and Holocausts that the Law prescribed. The Pharisees, in particular, were always inclined to attach more importance to external observances, than to the internal dispositions of the heart. Hence the question was by no means an unimportant or an unnecessary one.

The reply of Jesus, the Son of the living God, was not only clear but it was final and decisive; "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. *This* is the greatest and the first commandment." These divine words leave us in no doubt. Every Christian fully understands that his primary and most essential duty is to love God. The very first lesson that a Christian mother teaches her little children, as they gather around her knees, is that they should know God, and love Him in this world, so that they may be happy with Him forever in the next. We say "to know Him" as well as to love Him, because the two are inseparable. It is impossible to love God, unless we know Him. On the other hand, it is impossible for any honest mind really to know Him, without being drawn to love Him also.

Among our relations and our friends, there are many that we love intensely. Why do we so love them? It must be on account of certain qualities which they possess, and which render them agreeable to us. Let us then lay this to heart that whatever there may be of excellence in them, must be found in an eminent degree in God. Do we love them on account of their goodness, their gentleness, their generosity, or their prudence and wisdom? If so, let us reflect that all these attributes exist, only in an infinitely more perfect manner, in God Himself. Or perhaps we love them because of their great love of us, and because they have conferred so many favors upon us, and labored and suffered and endured much for our sakes. But, even considered from this point of view, God should excite an infinitely stronger love, for He has loved us far more than any creature has ever loved or will love or could love us. He has proved His love as no mere man has ever proved it. He has conferred on us graces and honors, and gifts and favors, beyond anything that any creature could possibly confer. And has sacrificed not only His honor, His reputation, His comfort, His dignity, but even life itself, in order to free us from sin, and the frightful consequences of sin. In short, whatever reasons we may allege for loving our bosom friends, and those who are dear to us, we shall be obliged to acknowledge that the reasons existing for loving God are not only greater, but *incomparably* greater.

So again, we may ask: Do we feel attached to our parents, because they have given us birth? Then, how much more strongly we should feel drawn to God, who has given us not only our very existence, but also the parents, by whose help, He has brought us into the world. We are easily touched when we have been exceptionally treated, and when we find that a special preference has been shown us. But who has shown us such exceptional treatment; who has exhibited to us such preference as God? Has He not created us, in preference to countless possible beings, whom He

might have chosen to create in our stead? Nay more. Has He not given us good Christian parents, while allowing millions of others to be born of heathens and of pagans? Has not His Providence placed us amid surroundings, in which me may work our salvation with comparative ease and security? Has He not, in short, done vastly more for us than He has done for others? If one of our fellow creatures had done for us a hundredeth or a thousandeth part of what God has done, and is still doing for us, we would feel stirred to the greatest gratitude. We would strive in every way to make some return to him for so much kindness and generosity, we would put ourselves to any trouble to render him a little service, and we would cherish his memory, and never hear his name mentioned, without sentiments of the greatest thankfulness. If such is our natural attitude towards a fellow creature, what should it be towards the infinite Creator, whose unapproachable splendor and magnificence and majesty confers a special value upon all His gifts? It is a slur upon our intellect that it should be thought necessary to prove our obligation to love God; and a reproach to our heart, that we should need a solemn precept, enjoining us to observe it.

Indeed, is it not wonderful that the only return God demands of us for all His innumerable gifts, and graces and favors, is that we should love Him. The only obligation, that He lays upon us, is one which is entirely consonant with our very nature, and which should rise spontaneously from our hearts. This command to love the supreme Being has been given, not so much for God's sake as for ours. What can the feeble love of us poor worms of the earth add either to the glory or to the happiness of Him, who is infinitely exalted beyond all the works of His hand? Nothing. But to us, that love means everything. It is the source of our sanctity; and the measure of our perfection. If we love Him, then we shall love to do His will and to carry out His commands. And what we do through love, we do with pleasure and with ease.

Besides, this love of God will influence all our actions, and clothe them with a beauty and a value, that exceeds all expression.

In commanding us to love God "with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind," Jesus Christ instructs us as to the manner, in which He wishes this precept to be observed. He would have us love Him as ardently as it is possible to love. The measure of our love, to quote the words of Saint Augustine, is "to love Him without measure." It is much too feeble a love, if it does not exceed and domineer over and absorb all other loves.

We shall accept this doctrine more readily when we remember that the love due to God is not of the same kind as that which we feel towards our personal friends. It is not a sensible tenderness; it is neither sensuous nor emotional. In fact, it resides rather in the intellect and in the will than in the feelings and the emotions. It is what theologians term "an appreciative love," or a love of preference. A husband may feel a more impressionable affection for his wife (or a mother for her children), than either feels for God. This is but natural, and is allowed by the Author of nature. But it *is not this sensitive love that God demands of us.* Whatever our feelings may be, and these are not always under our complete control, we are obliged to recognize His sovereignty over all His creatures. We are obliged to prefer His will, and His law, and His honor and glory to any mere human interest whatsoever. We must esteem Him beyond all His creatures. We must appreciate His divine favors more than any purely worldly gain that man can offer us. We must prefer the certain, infinite and eternal reward, which He promises us, in the possession of Himself, to the pleasures that we can derive from creatures. Hence, it follows that if we really love God as we should, we shall consent to forfeit all that we most cherish, even wife and children and possessions rather than forfeit eternal possession of the infinitely Good. Whatever may be our

FEELINGS of love for our friends, if we are ready to lose them all, rather than consent to one mortal sin, we prove that we really love God above all, in the true sense enjoined by the first and the greatest commandment. In this practical way we may test our love and show it to be supreme and above all other love; which, after all, is as much as God requires of us.

Of course, this love must not be simply speculative. It must not consist in the correct verdict of the mind alone. The great principle that God is to be loved above all persons and things, has to *be acted on, and reduced to practice,* in our daily life and conduct. It must be the secret force influencing all our actions, and governing all our thoughts.

To understand this truth let us consider the nature of love in general. It is the most powerful of all our passions. Indeed, one might almost say that it is our one and only passion, since all others, in their ultimate analysis, may be reduced to forms of love. When a strong love reigns in the soul, it engenders and gives rise to almost all our desires, aspirations and actions. If, dear brethren, you have ever lain under the influence of this passion, you will know how intimately it enters into every emotion of the soul, and how it dominates its whole life and conduct. It will influence us even when we are not aware of it and determine our line of conduct almost without our adverting to it. It may not be the distinct and visible object of each endeavor, but still it exercises a continual pressure. A traveler, who is anxious to reach some far-off city, may not keep the thought actually before his mind all the time, as he journeys along, yet this thought really determines all his actions. When he takes his ticket and drives to the station and purchases a newspaper to beguile the tedium of the way, or enters the buffet for lunch, he may not consciously connect these various actions with the object with which he set out; but whether he advert to it or not, they are all parts of the programme to be followed

if he is to reach the far off city without too much fatigue.

Now, if the love of God influence our hearts as it should; if it is the strongest and the predominant sentiment of our whole being, it ought to produce a somewhat similar effect. That is to say, it should direct all our actions; it should color all our thoughts; it should purify all our motives. And even though we may not at all times advert to it while performing the ordinary and commonplace duties of the day, yet they will all be performed through love of God, and will all form parts of our general purpose of binding ourselves to Him, with the strong cords of charity.

If we are in any doubt regarding the sincerity and the genuineness of our protestations of love, we have an infallible test which we can always apply. It is the answer to the question: Do we keep God's commandments? Between love and obedience there is the closest connection, and the most perfect harmony. Love leads to obedience, and obedience proves our love. This simple yet most certain indication of true love is asserted by our Lord Himself. "If you love Me, keep my commandments." (John xiv. 15.) And again, still more emphatically: "He that hath my commandments, and KEEPETH them, *he it is that loveth me.*" (Verse 21.) The beloved Apostle, who knew his Divine Master's heart better perhaps than all the rest, lays down the same principle in the fifth chapter of his first Epistle: "For this is the charity of God, that we keep His commandments." (1 John v. 3.)

And this is entirely consonant with reason, for to love God is to wish to please Him and to be agreeable to Him, and to win His approval and esteem; and to avoid whatever can wound or distress or offend Him. No one can persuade himself that he loves God, or that he is trying to please Him, while he deliberately does those very things which God commands him not to do. Let us then examine ourselves on this point and pass in review our past life and conduct; for, according to the manner in which we have kept or

broken the laws of God we shall find out most infallibly whether we are really loving God or not.

Now we must say a few words concerning the Second Commandment which, our Lord tells us, "is like to the First," *viz.*, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." There are three different objects toward which our love should be directed; *viz.*, toward God, toward our neighbor, and toward ourselves. In His address to His Apostles and disciples Jesus Christ insists on the first and the second, but He makes no reference to the third. And the reason is, because there is no need. The love of self is natural to man; it forms a part of his very being; he cannot dissociate himself from it. An infinitely gracious Providence has ingrafted that strong sentiment in our hearts in order that we should struggle and strive ceaselessly to attain that supreme happiness for which we are destined. This self-love may of course be misled and perverted, but it can never be destroyed. It may corrupt and degenerate, but it never grows weak. Furthermore, we may easily deceive ourselves so as to seek our happiness where it is not to be found; *but we must always seek it.* Even the deepest dyed sinner, who indulges every passion, and wallows in every libidinous mire, is obeying the dictates of self-love, though it is a self-love utterly mistaken and utterly gone atsray. He seeks evil, it is true, but under the appearance of good. He means to benefit himself, even when he commits sin, and will pursue evil, but only when it puts on the appearance of good. He will even precipitate himself headlong into the bottomless pit of hell, while intent and absorbed by the enjoyment of some imaginary pleasure. But if self-love is the great motive power in the sinner, it is no less the great motive power in the saint. The chief difference being that the first pursues an *imaginary* good, and allows himself to be attracted by a mere phantom; whereas the latter, whose eyes are open to the light of truth, rejects the mere shadow for the substance and sets to work in good earnest to secure his real and

permanent happiness, rather than its worthless counterfeit.

Since then every one, whether saint or sinner, naturally and inevitably loves himself, there was no need for our Lord to lay any stress upon that duty. However, as St. Augustine very truly observes, even though Jesus Christ does not actually command us to love ourselves, yet He undoubtedly takes it for granted that we do so, for He commands us to love our neighbor AS OURSELVES.

Though it is not necessary to command this self-love, yet it is necessary to control and direct it. It must be under the dominion of the highest of all love, namely the love of God. As that "first and greatest command" has God for its supreme object, so even the love we bear to ourselves must be referred to Him. Thus we must love ourselves in relation to God, and in the manner He approves. Hence it is not enough to desire our own happiness, we must desire the happiness which He has destined for us and seek it where He has placed it. There is a certain reciprocity in the double charity which we are called upon to practice toward God and ourselves. We love God for our own sakes, and we love ourselves for God's sake. I say, we love Him for our own sake, because we love Him as our supreme good, and because we place our eternal happiness in His possession. On the other hand, we love ourselves for His sake, inasmuch as it is not upon any object external to Him that we concentrate our love, but upon Himself alone, and inasmuch as we make our own felicity to consist in contemplating, admiring and honoring and glorifying Him.

Similarly, we love our friends both on our own account, and on their account, so long as we find our joy and happiness in the enjoyment of their personal qualities and attributes and dispositions; in a word, so long as we love them for what they are, and not merely for what they have. So, too, we love ourselves for the sake of God, so long as we recognize that our essen-

tial happiness is to be found in the focussing of all our powers on Him.

Throughout the Gospel Jesus Christ never separates these two loves. The love of God, and the love of our neighbor. Though asked to define only the first, He immediately adds the second. By this He would have us understand that they are inseparable; and that we cannot love God aright without at the same time loving our neighbor; and that we cannot love our neighbor aright without at the same time loving God. How can we be said to love God if we have no regard for those whom He commands us to love, whom He loves so intensely Himself, and for whom He did not hesitate to shed every drop of His most precious Blood. "If any man," declares St. John, "says 'I love God' and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother, whom he seeth, how can he love God, whom he seeth not." (1 John iv. 20.) On the other hand, if we love not God, how can we exercise that affection toward our neighbor, which is really founded upon our union with God, and on our desire to imitate Him as our perfect model in all things. The sure sign of our friendship with Christ; and the most evident mark of our apprenticeship to the divine Teacher is mutual love of one toward another. "By this let all men know that you are my disciples, that you have love one for another." (John xiii. 35.) In the early ages of Christianity this character was especially prominent and conspicuous, so that even the very pagans were wont to exclaim in wonder: "*Vide! ut invicem se diligant*" . . . See! HOW these Christians love one another.

But here we must strike a note of warning. Not every human attachment is according to the law of God. There are some attachments which have no reference to Him, and there are some which actually exclude Him. Such as these have nothing to do with that love of our neighbor which is commanded by Christ. In fact, as He has told us, "the Second Commandment is like to the First." The love of God and

of our neighbor must flow from the same source. As it is by a movement of divine grace that we love God, so it is by an extension of that grace that we include our fellow creatures. Further, we love God for His own sake, and we love our neighbor for God's sake, and in neither case are we commanded to exercise a sensitive or a passionate love. But just as we are to manifest a true love of God, by seeking His honor and glory and praise and adoration, so we are to manifest our true love of our neighbor by seeking his real and permanent good.

In loving our neighbor we do not, as it were, divide our heart between God and him. When we love our neighbor, it is God whom we love in him. We may truly say that the love of our neighbor is, as it were, the overflowing of our love of God which, filling up our hearts to the very brim, pours on to all whom His hands have made. So far from diminishing the ardor of our charity for God, it does but increase it; since it supplies us with fresh motives for blessing and praising His infinite generosity and superabundant goodness, made manifest in His creatures.

Let us then resolve to carry out this command to the very best of our power. We might well begin by looking into our hearts and seeing if they are free from all bitterness, rancour, and ill-feeling toward others. We must watch over our thoughts and carefully guard against forming hasty and unkind judgments of those around us. Then we should learn to distrust our own conclusions, especially when they are unfavorable to our neighbor. Every man has a just right to have his acts and his sayings favorably interpreted, unless the reasons against this are quite clear and evident. No one is to be held guilty, until his guilt is proved beyond a doubt. If we always acted up to these principles in daily life, we would escape many faults and avoid many serious breeches of charity.

It is very easy to pass sentence against others; it is very easy to condemn their conduct; but in so doing

we do but condemn ourselves, and bring down upon ourselves God's righteous anger. "Judge not and *you* shall not be judged," He says, "for with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again." (St. Matt. vii. 1.) Let us take the warning seriously to heart, and then we shall have little cause to fear, when we ourselves come to stand before the tremendous Judgment Seat of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be all honor and glory forever. Amen.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Forgiveness of Sins

Text:—"Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee."—(*Words from the Gospel of the day.*)

THE marvelous event recorded in the Gospel of St. Matthew, appointed to be read to-day, the eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, is told with a still greater wealth of detail by both St. Luke (v. 7) and St. Mark (ii. 1). We will, consequently, piece together the account of all three evangelists, and then we shall be the better able to draw some valuable lesson from the more complete and perfect picture thus presented.

For some days before the event narrated in to-day's Gospel, we must remember that our Blessed Lord had been traveling through Palestine not only preaching, but also confirming His doctrine by most startling miracles. Only a few days before He had set the whole country around in a ferment of wonder and admiration by cleansing an unfortunate leper and freeing him from his horrible and loathsome disease. And now we contemplate Him just arrived at "His own city" of Capharnaum.

We see Him, in our imagination, standing within the inner court of St. Peter's house and addressing the people. The concourse of hearers is so great that they stretch out far beyond the entrance. Since there is not room for them within they press all around the door outside. (Mark ii. 2.) Conspicuous among the crowd, we notice many Scribes and Pharisees, some, indeed, from the neighborhood around Galilee, but others from Judea and Jerusalem as well, which clearly proves how the fame of our Lord's miracles had already spread.

All at once there is a commotion amongst the peo-

ple. What has happened? Why! See. While He is yet talking, a sick man is being carried on a bed by four of his friends. They are coming toward Jesus Christ, the wonderful healer. But, lo! As they draw near the house, they halt and consult with one another, for they find that the multitude is so great there is no possibility of forcing a passage to the feet of the Divine Master.

Just watch them as they rest their living burden for a moment on the ground while they stand and consider what they had better do. Finding no other means available, they clamber up on to the top of the low flat roof (such as are common in the East) and begin to remove some of the loosely laid tiles. So soon as they have made an opening large enough for the purpose, they take the sick man, still stretched out upon his couch, and lower him, by means of ropes, into the very midst of the astonished assembly. Here the poor sufferer, in close proximity to his heavenly Physician, begins to plead for mercy and compassion as only a sufferer can.

In this scene before us, we posess all the conditions and circumstances that seem to call for some great manifestation of divine grace and power.

First, there is the enormous multitude of witnesses; then there is the presence of the proud and incredulous Scribes and Pharisees who "have eyes, but see not"; thirdly, there is the simple strong faith of the afflicted man himself; and, lastly, there are his four stalwart bearers, with their fervent faith and piety, earnestly beseeching for a cure.

Our Saviour is charmed at so great and so public a proof of their confidence in His power to help and to heal, and He resolves to grant their request—but not all at once.

For, we must remember, that Christ came upon earth for something more important than merely to cure those who are bodily afflicted, so He resolves to make use of this occasion to open men's eyes as to the divine nature of His own personality and to proclaim

His power over sin and all spiritual ailments. Before actually laying His hands upon the paralytic, He frees him from the far worse leprosy of sin by His mere word, saying, "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." (Mark ii. 5.)

In these few words He openly claims and, indeed, verily exercises the power of forgiving sins.

Moreover, this is well understood by the enemies of our Lord who are watching every movement and weighing every word. In fact, no sooner are the words uttered than the Scribes and Pharisees, who are stationed close by, take heed of them. They do not openly express their indignation and resentment, perhaps, because they are afraid, but (as the Evangelist distinctly tells us) they *think within themselves,* "He blasphemeth! For who can forgive sin but God only" (ii. 7).

Now, the forgiveness of sin is essentially a supernatural act, and its spiritual effects cannot be visibly observed. The eye is far too coarse an instrument with which to search the secrets of the soul. So our Lord proceeds to prove His power over the *invisible* world by exercising it in a most telling manner over the *visible* and tangible world.

His first move is a very effective one. He startles the Pharisees by giving them the clearest evidence that He can read their most secret thoughts, and that He knows, with the utmost accuracy and exactness, all that is passing in the deepest recesses of their hearts. For, though they have not spoken a word, He fearlessly reproaches them, saying: "Why do you *think evil in your hearts?*" (Matt. ix. 4.) Then, asking them which they think easier to say to the sick of the palsy, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," or to say, "Arise, take up thy bed and walk," he at once proceeds to work the miracle on the man's body—a stupendous marvel which every one of the multitude present can see and investigate for himself. This unheard-of prodigy furnished all who witnessed it with an incontestable proof that He had the power which

He claimed, to work the yet greater miracle on the soul.

To any mere man to work miraculous cures and to forgive sins, are both equally impossible; while, conversely, to God the one is, and must be, as easy and as simple as the other.

Consequently, the astounding sight of the paralytic, instantly restored to complete health by a mere word, was more than enough to satisfy any unprejudiced mind that Jesus was what He claimed to be, *viz.*, the eternal Son of God, who came upon earth to "take away the sins of the world."

"Arise!" exclaims our Blessed Lord, "Arise and take up thy bed, and go into thy house." (Mark ii. 11.) And, forthwith, the poor sufferer, that was bedridden and incapable of moving hand or foot, springs from his bed without any assistance, and is, at the same time, rendered so agile, vigorous and well that he not only walks without help, but is able to seize hold of his bed to lift it from the ground, and to swing it on to his shoulder, and to walk along with the burden to his own house amid the ringing cheers and clamorous congratulations of his friends and relations.

It was a unique experience and filled the hearts of the simple and innocent populace around with unbounded confidence in the power and goodness of our Divine Master, as well as with great astonishment and reverential awe. Some were heard to call out in their transports of joy: "We have seen wonderful things this day." (Luke v. 26.) Others shouted: "Well, indeed, we never saw the like before" (Mark ii. 12), while the paralytic himself gave vent to his feelings in loud and prolonged praises of God. (Luke v. 25.)

But the Pharisees! What is their attitude? These haughty and envious men look on, indeed, but they harden their hearts against the clearest evidence, and refuse to be convinced. Though our Lord gives them a magnificent chance and every opportunity, they will

not respond to it, but prefer to die in their sins. In fact, Jesus Christ works no less than three miracles before their very eyes, yet they obstinately persist in their unbelief. As it is impossible to deny the clearest evidence of their own senses, they are driven to acknowledge the facts themselves. Nevertheless, rather than accept them as proofs of Christ's divinity, they explain them away, and even accuse Him of blasphemy, and denounce Him as one who dares to assume a power and to claim a prerogative which belong to God alone. Thus, pride blinds the understanding and prevents even the obvious from being seen and recognized. The humble and simple poor gladly acknowledge the miracles of Christ, but the insolent and conceited leaders of the people attribute all He does to diabolical agencies. Well may our Divine Lord address his heavenly Father and say: "I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones!" (Matt. xi. 25.)

The whole of this preceding episode was, no doubt, arranged by our Lord as a preparation for the wonderful institution of the Sacrament of Penance, which was to follow a little later on.

Just as He multiplied the loaves in the desert, and changed water into wine at the marriage feast, for the special purpose of foreshadowing the miracle of the blessed Sacrament, and of preparing His disciples for its final institution, so He now openly exercises the "power of the keys" and absolves sins, just to prepare men's minds for the admirable and most benign institution of the great Sacrament of Reconciliation which was still to come.

It was not until after His death and glorious resurrection that He established this simple and beautiful means of reconciling the poor sinner with his offended God. Let us recall the scene. The Apostles were assembled together, in one place with closed doors, for fear of the Jews. When, all at once, without any

drawing of bolts or turning of keys, Jesus "came and stood in the midst of them." They were, naturally, beside themselves with delight and astonishment, and could scarcely believe their eyes. Jesus said: "Peace be to you"; then, after showing them His hands and feet and side, He went on to tell them that He would communicate to them the very powers that the Eternal Father had communicated to Him. "As the Father hath sent Me, so I also send you." (St. John xx. 20.) That is to say, as the Father sent Me to forgive sin, and to wash out the crimes and offenses of men, so I, in my turn, send you to do the same thing. The Apostles might well have asked how they, frail, weak men and sinners like the rest, could forgive sin. But our Lord anticipated the difficulty by letting them see that it was to be by virtue of a very special gift; in fact, by the incoming of the Holy Ghost. Then, "Breathing on them, He said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained."

The entire action was symbolical. The "breathing" indicated the passing of the Holy Spirit from our Lord into the disciples. When, at the beginning, God formed the lifeless body of Adam, we are told that "He *breathed* into His face the breath of life, and man became a living soul." (Gen. ii. 7.) The process of "breathing" in Holy Writ always indicates the conferring of some great gift. In the case before us, that gift was nothing less than God Himself, the Third Person of the adorable Trinity, by whose coming the disciples were made capable of doing what, in all strictness, God alone can do; *i. e.*, absolving from sin and all spiritual defilement. This divine power, like the power of consecration, was conferred upon the Apostles and disciples for the good of the whole Church. It was to be handed down, from generation to generation, to the end of time. And it has been exercised in all Catholic lands ever since the Church has spread into them, and claimed them for its own.

In non-Catholic countries the practise of confessing one's sins is either not followed at all, or else, as in the Anglican establishment, it is left to such pious souls as might feel a longing to unburden themselves to the "minister of God." And the reason is abundantly obvious. Naturally, no one really likes to openly own up to his faults. No one feels any special delight in exposing his hidden sins and disgraceful actions, his ingratitudes and meannesses, his avarice and sensuality, and the like. He will, assuredly, evade the ordeal if he can. It is a deep humiliation, but a most salutary one, since pride is at the bottom of all spiritual troubles. Hence, Protestants vociferously deny that there is any obligation to confess. They are obliged to acknowledge that Christ gave the Apostles and their successors the power to forgive sins, for that is *explicitly* stated, but they deny that any obligation exists to disclose what it is that has been done amiss. They do not see the necessity because they do not want to see. It would be disagreeable to have to recognize a duty which is so difficult of fulfilment. So they make up their minds not to recognize it Yet it is quite evidently contained in the very words of institution, as we shall now proceed to show.

For, observe, if our Lord had said simply: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven" and had added nothing more, we might speak with less assurance, but He said also: "Whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." That is to say, He told the Apostles to exercise a certain discretion. They were to distinguish between sin and sin. They were not only to forgive, but they were also, when the circumstances called for it, to refuse to forgive. They were called upon, in fact, to exercise the part of judges. They were to sit and sift each case. For surely our Lord did not expect them to act at random; to forgive one, and to withhold pardon from another, without in any way informing themselves of the merits of the case? Such an interpretation of Christ's words

would be outrageous indeed. No! It is perfectly plain that if our Lord commanded His followers to forgive sins, or to withhold forgiveness as they thought best, He must have intended them to act with some knowledge of the gravity and number of the offenses, as well as of the temper and disposition and sincerity of the culprits.

This, too, was always, and is still, the interpretation of the Church throughout the world. In all ages, since the beginning, the faithful have confessed their sins and have received absolution. It has always been the normal way of seeking reconciliation with God.

It was not till the so-called "Reformation" that evil-minded men, weary of the "sweet yoke" of Jesus Christ, threw off their allegiance and refused to submit to the humiliation of self-accusation. Nor is it to be wondered at, for just as humility is the mark of the Church of Christ, so pride is the mark of heresy wherever it is found. The Protestant tells us that he confesses to God, and has no need of any mediator or confessor. In fact, he speaks and acts just as though it rested with him to determine the conditions upon which he is to be forgiven. The simple fact is, that he is too proud to do what our Lord enjoins, too proud to cast himself down at the feet of a fellow man, a sinner like himself, and to acknowledge himself to be a disobedient and ungrateful child of God. It is so much easier to say that we will confess to God from whom we *cannot conceal* our guilt, even if we would, and who is neither seen nor heard, and who will not appear in person to insist upon such disagreeable duties being performed, as restitution and satisfaction, and so forth. So the leaders of the great spiritual revolt in the sixteenth century did away with the necessity of Confession to a priest, just as they did away with the obligation of hearing Mass, of obeying the Pope, of fasting, and of abstinence, and of other obligations trying and unpleasant to poor, fallen human nature.

But the true followers of the Divine Master, that is

to say, those who hear His voice, accept His doctrine, however repugnant it may be to flesh and blood, and willingly humble themselves because humility is one of the conditions which Christ, in His wisdom, has enjoined for the forgiveness of sin. Indeed, the more we examine the institution, the more we shall be struck by the wisdom of its divine Founder. For, observe, He seeks to cure as well as to forgive. And offers us a remedy as well as a pardon. Since every sin, no matter what may be its nature, is a rebellion against God, and, consequently, an *act of pride,* God, in His wisdom, obliges us, as a condition of pardon, to perform an act of *humility.* Diseases, it is said, are cured by their opposites—"*contraria contrariis curantur.*" If a rod be bent out of the perpendicular, it is not enough to put it straight, it is necessary to force it somewhat beyond the perpendicular, and in the opposite direction, so that, when released, it may remain perfectly straight. Similarly, when we have proudly violated a command of God, and fallen into disgrace, we are bidden to humble ourselves as a condition of pardon. Just as we turn away from the source of all grace by reason of our pride, so we turn back to Him by the exercise of the opposite virtue. We openly proclaim our guilt, we confess that we have done amiss, and while we humbly ask for absolution and a penance, we frankly admit our great sinfulness and unworthiness. We kneel before the minister of God, as before a duly appointed judge, and we leave him to decided concerning our dispositions. If restitution is requisite, we learn the fact from his lips; if certain proximate occasions of sin are first to be removed, or if a "reconciliation with our brother" is to be made before the much-desired absolution is imparted, it is the confessor who will tell us. Pride revolts against all this. Pride will own no judge, no master and wishes to be its own center, so will not brook this ordeal. It is only the sincere Catholic who, in obedience to God incarnate, forces down his pride and compels himself to accept in all humility the spe-

cial means appointed by God for the forgiveness of his offenses.

It is he, and he alone, who fully understands the full import of the words, "Whose sins *you* shall forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins *you* shall retain, they are retained."

These words truly express a divine power; divine in its origin from God, through our Saviour; divine in its extent, for it reaches as far as man's weakness and malice can go on the one hand, and Cod's mercy on the other; divine also in its beneficent operation, inasmuch as it remits so many sins, saves so many souls, allays despair, and imparts so much comfort, peace and joy. In the Sacrament of Penance, Jesus Christ takes the whole merit of His Redemption, and makes of it an inexhaustible and ever-flowing fountain of forgiveness of sin. Here we see so truly the goodness and loving kindness of our Divine Saviour. How we should thank Him for the inestimable benefits of the institution of this wonderful channel of grace. What would have become of us all without it? We should make use of it with great joy and confidence, for, in receiving it, we receive the price of His precious Blood and of His five wounds.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Small Number of the Elect

Text:—"Many are called, but few are chosen."—(*From the Gospel of the day.*)

DEARLY beloved brethren, the Holy Bible, from which I have selected my text, is not only the most interesting and the holiest of books, but it is also the most terrifying. As we thoughtfully turn its pages, the intimate consciousness that it is no other than God Himself who is speaking to us through its inspired words, fills us with awe. If, in other books, we find statements that trouble and distress us, we may console ourselves and soften their asperity by arguing that the author is exaggerating, or mistaken, or misinformed; but this is impossible when we are dealing with the infallible Word of God.

Now, one of the most terrifying statements to be met with in Holy Writ is that which I have choesn for my text, *viz.:* "Many are called, but few are chosen"

The first part of the sentence is consoling enough, for it places before us the goodness and love of God, who earnestly invites His children to that great and glorious marriage feast, in Heaven, which will have no end; but which will continue in undiminished splendor so long as God is God. It is true that His children are most numerous. They are made up of every race and tribe and nation, and of every color and tongue and condition. Yet though so "many," they are all invited to enter the marriage chamber and to rejoice with God, forever, in His Heavenly Home. "*Many are called.*" Though they differ among themselves, in innumerable ways, yet, whether rich or poor, learned or ignorant, young or old, they are all, without so much as one solitary exception,

called to be saved, and to be happy with God for all eternity.

And observe, my brethren, this is no mere pious opinion: nor just my own personal view, but an incontrovertible theological fact. We find it explicitly enunciated by St. Paul, who writes: "God wills *all men* to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim. ii. 4.) This, of itself, should be enough to satisfy us. But there are many other texts, both in the Old and in the New Testament which state the selfsame truth in somewhat different words. Thus we read in the Prophet Ezechiel: "As I live, saith the Lord, I desire *not* the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn away from his evil way, and live" (xxxiii. 11). And what Ezechiel says under the old dispensation, St. Peter says under the new, in almost identical terms: "God willeth not that any one should perish, but that *all* should return to penance." (2 Peter iii. 9.)

In addition to these texts we have the clear teaching of the infallible Church, which Christ has commanded us to hear, even "as Himself." She lays it down as a most certain principle that Jesus Christ came down from Heaven for the redemption of the whole world. None are excluded; none are excepted. He died for all, even for those who condemned Him, yes, even for the wretches who actually drove the cruel nails through his sacred Hands and Feet. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

This has always been the teaching of the true Church. St. Cyril of Jerusalem says that "God has opened the gate of eternal life, so that so far as He is concerned *all* may enter, if so they will." And Saint Thomas tells us that "God sends His graces to *all without exception,* as the sun sends down its beneficent rays upon all, even upon the blind." And countless other authorities might be quoted in the same sense.

In short, if it depended upon God alone, it is perfectly certain that no one would be lost. All men are

His children, and His sincere desire is that every single one of them should attain to the happiness of Heaven, and that none should perish.

Yet, in seeming contradiction to this, we are distinctly told that all are not saved. In fact that vast multitudes are eternally and irrevocably lost. But how is this? The reason is because man's salvation does not depend exclusively upon God. Or, perhaps we may express ourselves more accurately if we say, that it is because while on the one hand man's salvation depends entirely upon God, in another sense it depends entirely upon himself. This may sound a most puzzling statement, but I think an illustration will make its meaning clear. Suppose then that, through some accident, a child falls into a dry well. The sides of the well are smooth and straight and precipitous, so that he finds that all his efforts to get out are in vain. To save himself, by any efforts of his own, is impossible; and if no one comes to his aid he must certainly perish from hunger and want. But lo! His cries attract attention. His father hears his voice, and comes and lets down a rope to the poor boy. He says: "My son, seize hold of the end of the rope and I will pull you up and deliver you from your dangerous position." The boy does as he is told and his life is saved. Yes. But what has saved it? His salvation is the outcome of two different wills acting in conjunction, *viz.*, the father's will to save, and the boy's will to be saved. If the father had not come to his assistance with the rope, he could not possibly have saved himself. And if he had obstinately refused to exert himself and to lay hold of the rope, the father could not possibly have saved him. But, *by cooperating* with the efforts of his father, the son was able to extricate himself from his perilous position. Thus, in one sense, one may say that his salvation was wholly due to his father, who held out the rope to him; and in another sense it might be said that it was entirely due to himself and to his doing his part and cooperating with his father in grasping it tightly and

not letting it go until it brought him safely to the surface.

Precisely the same principle holds good in the supernatural order. Salvation depends entirely upon God. It depends upon Him alone in the sense that we can do nothing without Him. "Without Me, you can do nothing." Yet, in another sense—a negative sense—it depends entirely upon ourselves, for all God's goodness and all God's efforts will be in vain *unless we do our part;* in short, unless we cooperate with His grace. As St. Augustine reminds us, "God has *created* us without our cooperation; but He will not *save* us without our cooperation." He gives us all grace enough to save our souls, and gives it abundantly; but it is for us to make use of His graces and to avail ourselves of the many means which He places at our disposal. If many souls perish eternally no one can lay the blame upon God, "whose ways are mercy and truth" (Ps. xxiv. 10), but must attribute it wholly to their refusal to act up to His grace.

Observe, my brethren, that God the Creator has not made man a mere machine. Man is no mere automaton. No! He has been created a rational creature and endowed with a will of his own. God has given him liberty. He can exercise freedom and choose his own way. God offers him grace, but he may reject it. God points out the path of duty, he may decline to follow it; God invites him to Heaven, but he may choose to go to hell. "Life and death (*i. e.*, eternal life and eternal death) are before you, and that which you choose you shall have," says the Holy Ghost.

That vast numbers of men make a bad choice is undoubted. To convince ourselves of this appalling fact we have but to look out upon the world around us and see how men abuse their free will. Go into the vast cities and towns where millions are congregated together. How many of them are occupied with the affairs of their salvation? How many show any interest whatsoever in the "*unum necessarium*," the

"one thing necessary"? Hundreds of thousands never enter into any place of worship: and never bow the head nor bend the knee in prayer. They neither know God, nor wish to know Him, and live for this world alone. And even if we consider those members of human society who do go to church sometimes, and who at least acknowledge themselves to be Christians, the case is not much better. What worldliness one finds amongst them, and what forgetfulness of God and of His commands in their daily lives, which are often disgraced by intemperance, drunkenness, impurity, adultery, enmities, jealousies, quarrels, dishonesty and fraud, pride and haughtiness.

Go into the jails and prisons and visit the thousands of criminals confined in the cells: visit the law courts and listen to the criminal cases of all kinds brought up for judgment, or skim through the daily papers on any day of the week and consider the accounts of thefts, and murders and suicides, and the cases of arson, manslaughter, shop-lifting, intemperance and offences of all kind, and then remember that the crimes thus brought into public notice and commentated upon in the press are few and trifling compared to those which are committed in secret, and which are known to God alone and to the actual perpetrators.

Indeed the very best of us are liable to fall sometimes and may be cut off in our sins, in which case we should certainly be cast into hell. We live in a sea of temptation, and our evil passions, like violent winds, are always threatening us with spiritual shipwreck. Let me ask you, my brethren, frankly, if you have ever fallen into mortal sin? And, if you have fallen in the past and repented, you may fall again in the future, and die before you are given any opportunity of repenting. We are all in danger, and for this reason we are exhorted to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling." We know what temptations we have already passed through, but we know nothing of the violence or of the strength of those that

may still await us; nor how we shall conduct ourselves in the conflict. If we invoke the help of God, and if we cooperate with His garce, we know that nothing can injure us; but who can feel absolutely sure of himself? "I have seen," exclaims St. Augustine, "the stars of Heaven fall: I have witnessed the spiritual ruin of men, whose sanctity seemed as secure as that of a St. Gregory or of a St. Ambrose."

The one practical conclusion to which the text of our discourse points then is this. Although God sincerely wishes all men to be saved, and in the exercise of that merciful desire gives to all the means of salvation, yet the majority of men, through their own carelessness and indifference and culpable neglect of the graces offered them, perish miserably. "Many are called, but few are chosen."

It is a ghastly and an awful truth: and the more we reflect on it, the more terrible and the more frightful it grows. Consider for a moment that there are only two *permanent* places to which we can be sent when our earthly trial is over: either Heaven, into which nothing defiled can enter, or hell, where the worm dieth not and the fires are never extinguished. When we pass in thought from one to the other; when we think on the one hand what an eternity of delight means, and, on the other hand, what an eternity of torment means, we find it hard to understand the calmness, indeed I may almost say, the utter indifference with which this supremely important matter is treated by the great majority of mankind.

We have many relations and friends and acquaintances. How often do we reflect, as we meet them in business or at social gatherngs, that each one is qualifying for one of these two places? How deeply we would be impressed, were it revealed to us on divine authority that even one amongst them would ultimately be condemned to dwell forever in the flames of hell. The knowledge that a fellow man, one of our own friends, one whom we have conversed with a thou-

sand times, one perhaps living in comfort and ease and extremely sensitive to cold and heat and to every inequality of the season, had been condemned to hell for an act of impurity, or of drunkenness or dishonesty in business, would give us a shock from which it would be difficult to recover. If indeeed but one individual out of the whole human race had to submit to such a fate, the fact might well fill us with horror and dismay; but an infallible authority tells us that the damned are a vast multitude, which no man can number.

Century after century, and aeon after aeon, throughout endless ages, they will be confined to that "place of torment," as the Scriptures call it. Nations will rise and fall, and generation will follow generation, as wave follows wave on a wind-swept sea, but it will bring no change, no cessation of pain there. At last the earth itself will be dissolved, and the very sun will fail, and "time shall be no more," but it will make no atom of difference to the lost souls, for: "The smoke of their torments shall ascend up *forever and ever;* and they shall have rest neither day nor night." (Apoc. xiv. 11.) For "fire and brimstone and storms of winds shall be the portion of their cup." (Ps. x. 7.) Though, in this world, "they drank in sin like water," and delivered themselves up to all the pleasures of the flesh and laughed incredulously at God's threats and solemn warnings, they have now come to learn their terrible truth, and to realize that "God is not mocked." Then, when it is, alas! too late, they will cry out in their anguish: "We have erred from the way of truth, and the light of Justice hath not shined upon us, and the Sun of Understanding hath not risen upon us. We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction and have walked through hard ways: but the way of the Lord we have not known. What hath pride profited us? Or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow." (Wisdom v. 7-9.) For "they that work iniquity shall be

cast into the furnace of fire, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. xiii. 42.)

"Many are called, but few are chosen." If the comparatively small number of the elect were due, as some heretics have *falsely* taught, to God's deliberate will, if God predestined them to hell, from the beginning, our condition would indeed be desperate. Such a presentation of the case would paralyze us with fear and freeze up the blood in our veins. But the true doctrine, correctly stated, can have no other effect than to increase our watchfulness and to put us more thoroughly on our guard.

Remember that, though "few are chosen," that nevertheless no soul is lost but by its own personal and deliberate fault. No soul is sent to hell, who has not wilfully turned away from God and closed his eyes to the light. Hell is so full—and bear this well in mind—not because it is really difficult to be saved, but because so many foolishly and obstinately refuse to fulfil the simple and easy conditions enjoined by Christ. They will not deny themselves, nor obey God's commandments, although He commands nothing but what is right and just, and what every honest man ought to be glad and willing to do, even though no command had been issued.

Our Lord assures us that His "yoke is sweet and His burden is light." And if men are lost it is because they absolutely refuse to submit to His sweet yoke and to carry His light burden.

Let us, at least, take warning and guard ourselves from the contamination of the world and its false principles. The world makes light of sin: it hates all that interferes with its liberty; it despises penance and mortification and self-restraint: it would have us walk on the broad road. But beware! For the broad road leads to destruction. Yes, He who will one day judge us, has left us under no doubt upon that point. "Wide is the gate," He cries out to all who have ears to hear, "wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and *many*

there are who go in thereat." On the other hand: "How narrow is the gate and how strait is the way that leadeth to Life; and *few there are that find it.*" (Matt. vii. 13, 14.)

God is so good and so generous and loving that it is easy to save our souls provided we are really in earnest. But it is equally certain that it is easy, and very easy to lose our souls, if we are careless and indifferent and unwilling to exert ourselves and to take, at least, ordinary care.

Let us then, dear brethren, fill ourselves with a strong sense of the gravity of the issues at stake. We are here in this world but for a short time. Compared to eternity this present life is but a moment. True! Yet though only a moment, it is a moment on which the whole of our eternity depends. A moment which is to decide once and forever our future fate: a moment which will determine whether we are to rejoice forever with God, or to be tormented forever with the devil and his angels.

Considering what is at stake; nothing can justify a life of carelessness and tepidity; still less a life of worldliness and sin. Let us enter into ourselves and resolve, before the summons to judgment comes, to put our house in order, to reform our lives, and to live for God alone. To Him be all honor and glory forever. Amen.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Realization of Things Spiritual

Text:—"See . . . now you walk circumspectly, . . . redeeming the time, because the days are evil."—(*From the Epistle of the day.*)

"THE days are evil"—the days of this life, the days of man's earthly pilgrimage are filled with evil. This is no new discovery. From the time that Adam violated the command of God, to the present day, evil has stalked, like some malign influence, over the once fair face of this world. More than four thousand years ago Moses declared in inspired words that "all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth." (Gen. vi. 12.) St. John the Evangelist in his day made a similar statement, *viz.*, "the whole world is seated in wickedness." (1 John v. 19.) St. Augustine in the fifth century referred to the world as "a mass of damnation," and such, with little variation, has been the language of holy and enlightened men in all ages ever since. Indeed, the same evil reputation rests upon the world even at the present day.

The passing century—"the day" of our present life—is no exception. There is not a command of God that is not broken, not a precept that is not violated. Among the great masses of mankind, passion still seems to hold sway, and evil inclinations and sinful desires rule, in defiance of truth and justice. The daily papers are full of accounts of contracts broken, promises violated, and injustices done. Murders, suicides, robberies, drunkenness, fighting, quarreling, and unnatural crimes form an ever-recurring list. While to these we must add the immeasurably greater number of crimes and abominations that are never detected by man, and that no government official can register or take note of, but which are known to God alone.

The world is, indeed, a hot bed of depravity of every

kind. Well may St. John bid us "love not the world." (1 John ii. 15.) Well may the Scripture warn us that "the world is the enemy of God."

But why is the world so wicked? Well, because men so soon lose sight of and forget the very purpose of life. They forget that this world is no real resting place, but a mere stepping stone to another, and that we "have not here a lasting city."

Faith has grown dim. The great spiritual world, by its very nature impervious to the senses, gradually fails to impress its brightness and its beauty on men's minds, and then little by little fades away and disappears altogether from their consciences. Faith loses its hold, languishes, goes out, and leaves them in spiritual darkness.

Many talk and chatter as though faith were a thing of little moment. There was never so great a mistake. There is nothing so important in reality. Why? Because Faith rules the world. It is the most powerful factor we have to reckon with. It is a man's faith that determines his conduct. If you tamper with his creed you tamper with the whole of his life. A hand laid upon a man's creed is like a hand laid upon the rudder of a ship; the whole course of the ship is changed. In plain truth, a man is under the influence of his faith, almost as completely as a ship is under the influence of the rudder.

We are apt to attach too little importance to a person's inward faith. Why? Because we can not see it, as we can see his acts; we can not watch it as we may watch his conduct—or hear his words. It is, in short, not a measurable quality.

Yet it is just precisely that which is at the very root of the whole matter. It is invisible—true. But it is none the less active and energetic on that account. We do not see the main spring of our watch when we look at the hands to learn the time, yet the spring is the essential cause of their every movement. Indeed, all the greatest and most important forces of nature are invisible and impalpable. Take as an instance the

force of gravity. What is more invisible, or more impervious to the senses, considered in itself? Yet what plays so important a part in the whole physical universe? It is acting at every moment of time. It is acting at every point of space. Its influence is felt at once here in this very Church, and also in the most distant star. It controls equally the motions of the vastest planetary systems and the smallest particles of wandering dust. It determines the paths of gigantic suns no less than of each drop of falling rain. It is acting and influencing at all times every particle of matter of which all material things are composed. Yet it remains itself hidden and unperceived.

What gravity is in the physical order, that faith may be said to be in the moral and spiritual order. My acts, my conduct, my whole manner of life will be found to be, in a very marked and unmistakable manner, little more than the reflection of my faith.

It may be objected that it is reason that directs men. This is, of course, true. But reason can act only upon such *data* as are set before it. If the data be correct and sound, then reason, properly exercised, will lead me aright. But, observe, if the data be false, erroneous, or imperfect, then reason acting upon such false data will assuredly conduct me wrong; in fact, in that case, the more accurately I follow reason, the more surely and inevitably will it lead me hopelessly astray. It is like directing a ship by a compass that is disordered and out of gear.

Let me illustrate my meaning by an example—an example, alas! but too familiar nowadays. I refer to the sin of *suicide.*

A man commits the atrocious crime of self-destruction. It may indeed be said that he has violated reason; and truly. But why do we say so? Because we are supposing him to possess the Christian faith. We suppose he believes in God, who forbids self-destruction, and also in the punishment due to the act; thirdly, in the duty of exercising patience and resigna-

tion under his trials and miseries, by which he may reap an eternal reward; and so forth.

But if, for the moment, we change our supposition, then the case at once assumes an entirely different complexion. Suppose the man who drowns, or poisons himself, has already persuaded himself that there is no God, no Heaven and no hell. Suppose he is so lost to all sense of religion that he has at last succeeded in convincing himself that no hereafter exists, and that death ends all. In that case, why should he live one moment longer than he thinks desirable? Why should he prolong an existence which has lost all its charm? When once the balance of pain exceeds the balance of pleasure; when once a continuation of life comes to mean only poverty, disappointment, disease, and shame. Why should he not end his existence? Why? Well, let us see. Shall we say, because God forbids self-destruction? But the wretch does not believe in God. Or shall we say, in order to merit by patience and long suffering a higher place in Heaven? But he denies that there is a Heaven. Then may we not say: For fear of hell? No. For hell, to his mind, has no reality either. The simple fact is, that the sole *absence of faith* has removed all the solid motives that support a Christian. Reason remains, but has nothing to seize upon, no sufficient motive to influence it. When, therefore, he argues: "Life is only a burden; I will not carry it another step. I will throw it from me"; when he blows out life's brief candle before it is half burnt through, we must admit that *from his point of view,* erroneous though it be, criminal though it be, he has acted reasonably enough. It is not his reason that is at fault, it is his faith that has failed. What, then, is the cause of his suicide? Not the want of reason, but the want of true belief in God, in future judgment, in heaven and hell. If we once allow his premises and aver that what he holds is true, then to take his own life would be about the wisest thing he could do. Thus faith may be true, or it may be false, but whether true or false, it *determine a man's*

line of action. So long as a man's faith is false, it must lead him to do wrong, for man acts, as a rule at least, according to his faith. There is, consequently, no real remedy but to restore to him this great theological virtue, "without which, it is impossible to please God." (Heb. xi. 6.)

It is much the same as regards every other evil passion and propensity of corrupt nature. Faith, and all the doctrines that faith includes, supply us with motives, varied enough, and strong enough, to enable us to resist all sin. But if our faith become undermined we no longer stand on the solid rock, but rather on the unstable sand.

Take such sins as impurity, luxury, avarice, pride. Corrupt nature is prone to all these excesses. Nature clamors for indulgence in all that can feed its rebellious appetites. Why, then, do I resist? Well, the thought of the penalty of sin sobers me. The knowledge that a moment's sinful delight *here* will be followed by an eternity of agony *hereafter* steadies my too skipping spirit. The forfeiture of heaven and eternal joys makes me pause, and I put myself the question, is it worth my while to forfeit all for a moment's indulgence? Still more powerful will be the motive of love of God. I will not outrage my infinite Benefactor—no! I cannot bring myself to offend so merciful and loving a Saviour. I look at him in the stable of Bethlehem and I remember He became Man for my sake. I say with St. Paul, "He loved me and delivered himself for me." (Gal. ii. 20.) I gaze at Him on the cross, and I feel how passionate that love was. Yes; He, the mighty God, sacrifices His own temporal life that I might possess eternal life. He dies that I might not die. And these thoughts, that faith has planted deep within me, steel my heart against temptation, and fortify my will, and infuse such a hatred of sin that at last I cry out, "No, never shall I break thy law, oh, God, never for anything in this world shall I ever offend Thee, the infinite, the uncreated, the eternal Goodness." Truly faith holds

me back, keeps me in check, gives me the mastery over my passions, and fixes and secures my resolution for good.

But what will stem the tempestuous torrent of passion where faith is dead! What will control the rebellious and wayward spirit of man when all these supernatural bulwarks have crumbled away?

If there be no God, no future, nothing to long for, and nothing to fear beyond the grave, who will put a curb on men's passions? If they have no solid groundwork of faith where will the restraining influence be found? Where will you place your lever?

If this life be all, why indeed *should* I restrain myself? Why should I not indulge every inclination to the full? Why should I consult anything but my own immediate pleasure and satisfaction? O! If this life be all, then give me full rein. Seek not to bridle my passions. Let me spend my brief day in dissipation, and joviality, and in amusements; in banqueting and carousing, and every form of luxuriousness.

If a man finds pleasure in living like a pig, and wallowing in the mire of sensuality and animal delights, who can blame him, *if this life be the sum total of his existence.* You, my brethren, and I may prefer to live like a philosopher—but tastes differ. *He* may prefer to live like a beast. Who will censure him? Pleasure is become the only law, the only guide. You find *your* pleasure in contemplating the stars; *he* thinks it more amusing to spend his days in a tavern, or a bawdy-house, and gratify his lowest animal propensities. Why is the one existence one whit better than another, if there be no eternal law, no immutable standard of right and wrong; no divine and supernatural sanction?

My brethren, the inevitable tendency of loss of faith is a loss of self-respect and of self-control. It is quite impossible that the enormously weighty motives that faith supplies can disappear without introducing an entire change in life and conduct, because, as I have pointed out, life and conduct are controlled by faith.

To rob a man of faith, is to sap and undermine the very foundation of his morality, and to shiver into pieces the rock upon which he stands.

A strong, vivid, earnest faith is at the very root of the spiritual life, hence the Holy Spirit says, "The just man lives by faith." (Rom. i. 17.) On the other hand the total absence of supernatural faith destroys the spiritual life, and opens the door to every iniquity.

But there is another state lying between these two; a state in which there is neither great vividness nor strength of faith, one the one hand, nor yet a total want of faith, on the other.

This, it is to be feared, is the condition of many of us Catholics. We possess faith, *i. e.*, we really believe, but in such a cold, languid, unreal manner, that the result is often very much as though we did not believe at all.

Why is there so little fervor in our lives, so little desire to amend; so little anxiety to receive the sacraments frequently and to receive them fervently? So little shrinking from venial sin? It must all be traced in its ultimate analysis to a want of vivid faith; we believe, but we do not realize what we believe. It is one thing to know a doctrine to be true, it is another, and a very different thing, to bring home to ourselves practically and distinctly the import of that doctrine.

This is a fact clearly understood and acted on by the children of this world. We find manufacturers and tradesmen and sellers of various goods constantly acting upon this principle. A man, for instance, is anxious to sell a powder, or a soap, or other article of general consumption which he has invented. He knows it is not enough to boldly state its excellences, nor to enunciate its remarkable qualities in colorless words. If people are to be induced to buy it, they must not only know, they must be helped and aroused to realize and to discern these qualities. Hence instead of a printed notice, we meet pictorial ones. We look at the boardings up and down the city and we see the representation of a blackamoor growing white

under the influence of the soap; or a delicate and spotlessly clean hand is stretched out, holding a piece of soap, beneath which runs the legend: "I never use any other!" Or perhaps it is some patent food for infants that is being thrust on the market. This is not merely recommended in a few printed lines, but an infant is represented devouring it with every expression of delight and satisfaction. The dish is empty and he is licking the spoon. Furthermore, he is made to look a perfect picture of health and strength, and as we examine the rounded, dimpled limbs, and admire their preternatural plumpness, we are very sensibly aided in our efforts to realize the admirable properties of this patent food. But why all this enormous additional expense? Why all this outlay of artistic talent? Simply and solely, my brethren, to impress and to bring home to the public more forcibly and vividly the consciousness of the qualities of the goods, and to induce it to purchase them in greater quantities.

In one word, men are well aware that it is one thing to know and another to realize.

Well, dear brethren, if this is to some extent true as regards even the material things of earth, it is immeasurably more true as regards the great spiritual truths of faith, which are, by their very nature, invisible and intangible. If the teachings of faith are really to exercise a decided influence upon our lives, they must be vividly apprehended, and, in a sense, rendered visible. We must not merely offer a cold, passive assent, but we must set before us a graphic picture of what is meant. Then, but not before, will faith begin to work the wonders in us that it worked, and still works, in the saints.

Let me illustrate my meaning: I once knew a hardworking laboring man, who used habitually to neglect Mass on Sundays. One Sunday I went to his house about noon. He was still in bed. So I called again in the afternoon, and after a few preliminary remarks I said, "I am sorry to find you were not at

Mass this morning." "No; I was very tired," he replied. That was his only excuse. He simply did not feel inclined. But I said, "You are a Catholic; you know, first, that God commands you to keep the Sunday holy and to hear Mass; second, that an eternal reward may be merited by the fulfilment of this duty; third, that an eternal punishment awaits all wilful breakers of the divine law; fourth, that you are doing a grievous wrong to your children, who are far more influenced by your example than by your words; and, fifth, that you are making an enemy of one who is infinitely powerful." And I added much more besides, but I told him nothing that he had not heard before; nothing but what he already believed, yet it was all to no purpose; he absented himself from Mass again the following Sunday.

Now observe, on the other hand, that Monday found him up before six, shouldering his tools, and on his way to his place of business, and by noon he had completed half a day's work. How are we to explain this? What is there so much more exhilarating in a Monday than in a Sunday? What induces him to conquer on a Monday the laziness that proves fatal on Sunday? Why is he up and active at six on Monday, and abed even at midday on Sunday? Well! On Monday he gets up before sunrise, first, because he is unwilling to offend his earthly master and lose his employment, *i, e.*, he thinks more of offending man than of offending God. Secondly, because he is promised a few shillings in wages, *i. e.*, in other words, he esteems a few shillings in this life more highly than the eternal rewards of the next world. Thirdly, because he will suffer want and perhaps hunger unless he works, *i. e.*, he dreads temporal want and hunger more than hell fire. Fourthly, because he can not see his children in want and starving, *i. e.*, he thinks more of his children's temporal comfort than of their eternal interests.

Why do the *super*natural motives influence him so little, and the *natural* motives so much? Are the su-

pernatural motives of less force, less weighty *in themselves?* On the contrary, they are immeasurably more weighty—in fact, there is really no comparison. Then why do the less stir a man up, and force him to exert and to deny himself, while the greater can not move him at all? Because he does not, as a fact, realize the meaning of the very doctrines which he, as a Catholic, professes. He realizes what a day's wages are; he realizes the food and the drink, and the clothing that it will procure him; but he does not realize the greatness and majesty of God and His divine claims, nor the rewards in store for the good and the obedient.

He will do more for earth than for heaven; for time than for eternity, for the same reason that a silly little child, whose reason is not yet developed, will run across the room, and overcome its shyness when offered some gaudy, glittering toy formed of gold paper and tinsel, and will yet shrink away and sulk in a corner if asked to exchange it for a banknote of a thousand pounds. *We,* too, often fail to realize the infinite value of spiritual things, and prefer the tinsel of earth to the delights of heaven. Faith—sound faith, vivid faith, is the radical remedy for such a deplorable condition of mind.

I have chosen the case of a poor laboring man, but precisely the same truth holds good of the wealthiest and noblest in the land.

Take some vain woman of society. See her at her toilet table. She is about to be presented at court, and to enter the Queen's drawing-room at Buckingham Palace; or she has been invited to dine with the Prince or with some great nobleman, and all the élite of London are to be there. Now, observe, I am not saying a word against presentations, drawing-rooms, or state dinners. I dare say, many of the invited are most excellent and holy persons — perhaps some (though I am afraid not a very large number), like Queen Elizabeth of Hungary, even wear beneath their gorgeous robes a hair shirt, or a steel chain with sharp

points, to mortify their flesh. But I am not alluding to such; no, I am speaking of a vain and worldly woman; and the species, I believe, is not yet wholly extinct. Such a one is preparing to attend a levee, or a banquet, or ball, or whatever it may be. See how anxious she is to look her best; how exceedingly careful she is in the arrangement of her dress; how important it is that it should be just exactly according to the latest fashion. Not a crease, not a stain must appear. Then her jewelry! Oh! that is very important. She will try on first one necklace, then another. She thinks the emerald one may suit her complexion; but no, for the diamond and pearl will best reflect her wealth and station. No; that won't do—she tries the sapphire with the gold pendants. Ah! yes! Now, *that* looks quite heavenly. And so she goes on, giving herself and all her attendants endless trouble and vexation. Then her hair, and her hands, and every feature is a subject of engrossing interest and anxiety to her; while the sums she has disbursed for the powders, the scents, the cosmetics, and the other objects now lying on her toilet table would keep a poor family in comfort for weeks.

Now, the question I wish to put to you is, why is this lady so much more anxious about the beauty of her body than about the beauty of her soul? How can we harmonize her extraordinary anxiety to please the vain eyes of men with her utter indifference about pleasing the divine eyes of God? How comes it that she will spend so much time, and trouble, and money to secure a temporary triumph, and to look pretty, attractive, and handsome for a couple of hours in a nobleman's drawing-room, and yet take no trouble whatever to look attractive and glorious and honorable in the sight of God and His holy angels? If a spot or a blotch or an unsightly mark disfigures the fair features of her face, she is quite unhappy, and will take endless trouble to dislodge it. And yet, strange to say, she thinks little of the sins that stain her soul, of the blemishes that destroy the comeliness of her

spiritual beauty. She will put herself to endless trouble to remove a disfiguring mole or eruption from her cheek, yet she will not even make use of the simple expedient of confession to wash herself clean from the leprosy of sin. Why is this? The explanation is ever the same. Her reprehensible conduct arises from a want of lively faith in spiritual things. She believes in God, and would wax exceedingly wroth if you said she did not, but her faith is cold, dead, unappreciative and unreal.

Who, indeed, realizing the greatness and majesty of God, and the absolute nothingness of man, would, or indeed *could,* so act? Who in any degree really conscious of the presence of God, would be at greater pains to please the servant than the Lord of all. Consider the grandeur and magnificence of the eternal King of everlasting glory. The pillars of heaven tremble before Him; the angels are not pure in His sight. Cherubim and Seraphim veil their faces and fall down in awe and adoration before that irresistible Power. The whole earth is to Him but as a grain of impalbable dust, or a drop of the morning dew. The constellations of stars that fill all space, and the vast suns rolling through the untold wastes of heaven are even, when all taken together, but an ignominious mote. "All things are before Him as though they were not." Who realizing, even faintly and dimly, His unspeakable greatness would turn their back upon Him, in order to seek the favor of men.

It would be impossible were faith lively, and its teachings clearly apprehended.

And similar reflections might be made concerning all the other acts of life. A clear perception of the great doctrines of the Church and a strong ardent faith will ever make for holiness and innocence of life. Seek a more intimate acquaintance with the invisible world; learn to judge of things as they are, and not as they appear, and it will introduce a marked improvement into life.

And how are we to acquire this vivid faith, which is at the root of all sanctity?

1. By earnestly imploring it of God, "Lord, increase my faith." (Luke xvii. 5.) "Ask and you shall receive." (John xvi. 24.)

2. By thoughtful meditation and by dwelling in loving contemplation upon the mysteries of faith.

3. By reading books, treating of the various tenets of our faith. God will speak to our minds and flood our hearts with His divine light as we read. He always assists those who show themselves to be in earnest.

4. By exercising faith, making acts of faith, and striving to keep ever before the eyes of our souls the revealed truth we profess.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

A Great Lord and His Servant

Text:—"I forgave thee all the debt, because thou besoughtest me; shouldst not thou, then, have had compassion also on thy fellow servant, even as I had compassion on thee?"—(*From the Gospel of the day.*)

GOD'S love for us is one of the greatest of mysteries. When we think who He is, and then consider who we are, we feel wholly at a loss to account for His immense and measureless charity. He became incarnate for our sakes, He lived, He suffered, He died a most atrocious death, for our salvation. There is nothing He has left undone to win our love. For sake of that, He was ready to give up all. His time, His comfort, His reputation, His very life were sacrificed, as the Church reminds us, "*propter nos homines, et propter nostram salutem,*" that is to say, "for us men and for our salvation."

And, as Christ loved us with such a boundless love, so He wishes us, as most dear children, to walk in His footsteps, and to love one another with a similar true, persevering and practical love. This must be regarded as a most sacred duty, for it is inculcated again and again in the pages of Holy Scripture. "Be ye followers of God, as most dear children, and walk in love, *as Christ also hath loved us,* and hath delivereth Himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God, for an odor of sweetness." (Eph. v. 1, 2.) So again: "All things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets." (Matt. vii. 12.) And yet more unmistakably and peremptorily: "This is my commandment, that you love one another *as I have loved you.*" (John xv. 12.)

On the other hand, any disregard of this command, is a most serious matter. "He that loveth not, abideth

in death." And, "whosoever hateth his brother, is a murderer." (1 John iii. 14.) But there is no need to multiply texts; let it suffice to say that the love of our neighbor is one of the most practical, one of the most pressing, and one of the most important of all our spiritual duties. My purpose, in bringing this subject before you to-day, is to help you to fulfil this duty, by supplying you with some of the very strong motives for doing so, to the very best of your power.

Let us then put ourselves the question: Why should I do my very utmost to exercise brotherly love? I reply: For many and most cogent reasons; in the first place: (1) because it is the express command of our sovereign King and Master. "A new commandment I give unto you; that you love one another, as I have loved you." (John xiii. 34.) This is His command, and if we love Him, we must fully realize the necessity of obeying His commands, according to the words: "If you love Me, keep my Commandments."

(2) Secondly, we must exercise brotherly love, because He has selected this duty from among all the rest, as a sign and as a special mark, by which we are to be known to all the world, as His disciples, saying: "By this, let all men know that you are My disciples, that you love one another." From the very earliest times charity has been a most conspicuous mark of the true followers of Christ. The very pagans were astounded and impressed by the extraordinary unity that prevailed amongst the members of the infant Church, when "they were all of one heart and of one mind." They were wholly astonished at the mutual regard, the sympathy, the gentleness and the charity that permeated the lives of those, whom they were persecuting, imprisoning and putting to death. Again and again, they would cry out, in wonder and in admiration: "Behold, how these Christians love one another!" And what was such a marked characteristic of the first Christians, should be the ever-living characteristic of Christians in all places. and in all ages. If then, my dear brethren, we would be ranked

among the disciples of our Divine Lord, let us watch over ourselves, and be most careful to exercise mutual love and forbearance.

(3) The third motive urging us to fulfil this law, is because the charity we show toward our brethren our Blessed Lord deigns to accept just as though it were exercised toward Himself in person "Whatsoever you have done to the least of My little ones, you have done unto Me." These words are worthy of the utmost attention, and should be of the greatest encouragement to us. Our Lord knows how anxious we are to show Him honor and affection, so He opens out to us the simplest possible means of gratifying our laudable desire. Though no longer visibly present on earth, though no longer in want of material things, as He once deigned to be, when, for instance, He sat down hungry by the well side, or when He exclaimed, "the birds of the air have their nests, and the beasts their dens, but the Son of man hath not whereon to lay His head," yet he is still with us and still suffering in the person of the poor and the afflicted, the distressed, and the sorrowful. And, what is more, He commands us to see in them the representatives of Himself and to honor them, and to succor them in their needs, just as though we were administering to Himself. Yet more mavellous still, He pledges us His solemn word, that whatsoever we do for them (if we only do it in the proper spirit), He will accept and reward, exactly as if we had done it to Himself.

How often, while reading and pondering over the Gospel narrative, must we have wished that we had lived in those distant days, so that we might have come to our Lord's assistance, and supplied all His wants! How gladly would we have laid our treasures at His feeet, and how joyfully would we have given of our best to feed, and nourish, and clothe Him. At all events, we flatter ourselves that such would have been the case. But would it *really* have been so? Or are we not rather deceiving ourselves? It is so much easier to suppose that we should have acted with gen-

erosity, in a hypothetical case, than to test ourselves by an actual one. The question is, how do we now treat the poor, the sick, the sorrowful, the afflicted? What is the extent of our compassion for them? To what lengths are we willing to go, in order to alleviate their heavy trials? If we will do nothing, or little for them, rest assured, that we would not have done very much, even for Christ Himself, had we lived at the same period. Cease to lament that you did not live in the days when He walked the earth. For, the truth is, that in a very true sense, He *still* walks the earth, in the person of His poor, so that we may always succor Him, by succoring them, and feed and clothe Him, by feeding and clothing the hungry and the naked. He will watch and bless such deeds of charity, and will bestow upon us a reward just as great and munificent as though He had been the actual recipient. He makes no distinction. "Whatsoever you did unto them, you did unto me."

Then, (4) there is a fourth motive which should urge us to the practice of this wonderful virtue, and it is that God has promised to deal with us as we deal with our neighbors. In this He almost seems to give us the power of determining His attitude toward us. He teaches us how to change Him from an angry and avengeful Judge into a merciful and lenient Father. Listen to these extremely weighty words: "In whatsoever measure you have meted out to others, it shall be meted out to you." Here our merciful and most just Lord assures us that He will watch us, and study our conduct and bearing toward our neighbor, and then make that the pattern and rule of His conduct and bearing toward ourselves. If, therefore, we are exacting and fault-finding and censorious towards others, if we are hard and revengeful and slow to forgive, then He will be harsh and severe towards us. On the other hand, if we are kind and accommodating, and full of patience, if we are ever ready to excuse and to put a favorable interpretation upon the actions and doings of others, we shall transform the heart of our

supreme Judge, and render Him favorably disposed towards us. In a word: He will act towards us, as we act towards others. He will be easy, forgiving and even indulgent and treat us with the utmost tenderness and compassion. This is clearly the teaching of Holy Writ. "Mercy," exclaims the inspired writer, "to him who hath shown mercy, but justice and *no mercy* to him who hath not shown mercy." This law seems to run through all God's dealing with His responsible creatures. Even in that most beautiful of all prayers, the Our Father, are we not taught it? Whenever we recite the petition: "Forgive us our trespasses, *as we forgive them who trespass against us,*" we actually ask God to treat us in the same manner as we treat others.

In order to accentuate this rule still further, and to bring it more clearly and forcibly before even the most unobservant amongst us, our Lord makes use of some striking examples. We have one set before us in today's Gospel. There we have represented a great king, who would take an account of his servants. That king is no other than Jesus Christ, the King of kings and the Lord of Heaven and earth. Now, there is one in His kingdom who has the misfortune to owe Him ten thousand talents, a sum which he feels quite incapable of paying. This debtor is an image of the sinner—of you, my dear brethren, and of me. This sinner has often, and perhaps grievously offended his loving Master, and broken His Commandments, and consequently owes Him a reparation so great that he cannot possibly make it unassisted. This debt of sin is symbolized by the "ten thousand talents," which was far beyond the means of the unfortunate steward, who knew not what to do to appease his Lord's demands. At last, finding it impossible to meet his liabilities, he determined to throw himself on his Lord's mercy, and to beg Him to have compassion, and to forgive him. He reasoned within himself, "my Master is good and kind and ever ready to pardon the repentant offender; I am sure, 'he will not break the bruised reed, nor ex-

tinguish the smoldering flax.' (Matt. xii. 20.) Therefore, courage, O! my soul; I will go and beseech Him to let me off this debt and to free me from an obligation which I know not how to meet." Accordingly, he approaches his Sovereign, and sets before Him his sad plight, and with such success that the King's heart is touched and, in an excess of benevolence, He actually forgives him all this enormous debt, and restores him to His favor, and sends him away rejoicing. So far, so good.

But alas! Poor fallen human nature. This magnificent lesson, this most splendid example of generosity and magnanimity is entirely thrown away on the witless steward. Though he has just experienced the greatest consideration and patience on the part of his superior; his own heart remains harsh and exacting and cruel toward his own fellow citizen, who chances to owe him the paltry sum of a hundred pence. He acts just as though such a lesson had never been given him. So much so that the Evangelist tells us that shortly after his Lord had forgiven him the debt, he met one of his fellow servants, who owed him a hundred pence, and "laying hold of him, he throttled him, saying: Pay what thou owest." And his fellow servant, falling down upon his knees, besought him, saying: "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." This was a golden opportunity, my dear brethren, of imitating the mercy and compassion of his own supreme king and master and of practising brotherly love. This was an occasion, not to be thrown away, of putting in force the admirable lesson that had just been taught him, and by which he had so largely profited. But, like so many of us, he was thoroughly selfish. He had been freed from his enormous debt; he had been rescued from the prison and the tortures that were his due, according to the law of the land against impecunious debtors; and one might have thought that he would have shown some little consideration and softness towards a fellow servant. But, nothing of the kind. His heart was as tough and as

irresponsive and as cold as a stone. He determined to put the law in motion and went "and cast him into prison, till he paid the debt."

Now, those who witnessed this cruelty, were naturally indignant. Here is a man, they exclaimed to one another, who has received every consideration at the hands of the king, and who would be lying in prison at this moment, were it not for his extraordinary mercy, yet he will not show the slightest patience or forbearance with one of his own set, who owes him less than a ten thousenth part of what he owed his sovereign. At last they could endure it no longer, and went and told their lord all that had happened. Then the king's countenance changed, and he grew exceedingly angry. He summoned his guilty subject before him. He upraided him for his inhuman conduct, and said, no doubt, in severe and pitiless tones: "Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all the debt" (not because thou deservest to be forgiven, nor because I was under any obligation to do so, but) "because thou besoughtest me; shouldst not thou then have had compassion also on thy fellow servant, even as I have compassion on thee?"

Here we have the rule exemplified again. In this parable, the Overlord sets the example of gentleness and indulgence, which he expects his subjects to follow. And, if they do really follow it, all will be well with them. But if they apply a harsher rule of conduct to their fellow servants, then the Overlord will call them to account, and will deal with them even as they have chosen to deal with their fellows. In the case set before us, in to-day's Gospel, the king, who had shown himself so extremely lenient toward his debtor, altered and reversed his whole attitude, so soon as he learned how the debtor had acted towards his fellow servant. He seemed to say: "Very well; since you refuse to act toward others, as I act towards you, I shall act toward you as you act toward others. If you are unforgiving and overbearing, you will experience the full weight of my justice, and my

mercy will be extended to those only, who have shown mercy." And the Evangelist goes on to narrate: "His lord, being angry, delivered him to the tortures until he paid all his debt." And, lest there should be any doubt as to the nature of the instruction that this parable is intended to convey, Jesus adds: "So also shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."

Now, my dear brethren, we may well pause awhile here, to ask ourselves whether we have hitherto laid this principle sufficiently to heart. There can be no doubt, but that we stand sadly in need of God's clemency and fatherly indulgence. We are all sinners, and have in many ways offended, and transgressed. We shall soon be summoned before the tremendous Judgment Seat, to give a full and detailed account of our conduct. How shall we then fare, if we find ourselves in presence of an angry and an exacting Judge? If we desire to appease His wrath, and to allay His indignation, and to transform Him into a God of tenderness and compassion, then we shall do well to examine our attitude of mind and of heart toward our brethren and fellow-laborers in the vineyard of this world. If we put ourselves the question: "How will God deal with me in judgment? Will He be severe and strict and exacting; or on the contrary, will He be forgiving, patient and clement? Will He exercise all the rigors of strict justice; or will He be ready to excuse, to make allowances, and to exonerate? Surely this is a practical and a burning question! Yet the answer is an easy one; and, let me add, a most consoling one. The answer is that it depends upon myself. How will God deal with me? How? Why, of course, He will deal with me, *as I deal with others*. If I am compassionate, and patient with my companions and my subordinates, and ready to make allowances and to overlook their faults, and to make excuses for them, and to put a favorable interpretation on their actions and conduct, I may be quite sure that God will also make allowances for me, and excuse my many faults

and imperfections, and judge me with wonderful leniency and commiseration.

Let us consider our wonted attitude toward our companions. How strict, and even unjust we often are in our judgments. How ready to put the worst, rather than the best interpretation on their sayings and doings. If we surprise them in an equivocal position, or in some compromising situation, how ready we are to think evil of them; and perhaps even to announce our ungrounded suspicions to all our friends. How ready we are to repeat and to spread abroad tales that may indeed be piquant and amusing, but little to the credit of our neighbor. The least scandal or sensational story is too often carried by us into a hundred directions, to the detriment and the mortification of those concerned. Yet with all this want of charity and of self-restraint, we expect our Divine Lord to exhibit the utmost charity toward ourselves.

So again, how exacting we are! We cannot wait nor exercise any patience with those who are our debtors. We demand instant redress and satisfaction if we think ourselves insulted or injured or in any way slighted or neglected. Though we expect God to make allowance *for us,* we act as though we thought no allowances need be made *by* us. Well may God say to us: "O! thou wicked servant, shouldst not thou have compassion on thy fellow servant, even as thou expecteth me to have compassion on thee."

If God were to act toward us as we often act toward our neighbor, how should we have fared in the past. Go back, in spirit, over the years that have gone by. Consider the various occasions in which you have misbehaved yourselves, and disregarded the laws of your sovereign Master. Call to mind the many deliberate sins you have committed. Sins of neglect, sins of passion, sins of the flesh. Where might you now be, had God not shown you an infintie compassion and a divine patience. Had the sovereign Judge summoned you before Him after your first grievous sin, and demanded instant satisfaction, and threat-

ened to cast you into the prison of hell, unless you could pay a fitting indemnity; and had He turned a deaf ear to all your entreaties and prayers, you would now be writhing in the flames of the bottomless pit. But, so far from showing such severity, He has waited and waited, perhaps for years, till your evil dispositions should change, and you should beseech Him to forgive you. Then, at your first petition, He at once showed Himself to be the merciful and loving Father, only too ready to extend a helping hand, and to draw you tenderly to His Sacred Heart.

And if He acts so mercifully toward us, are we to exercise no mercy towards others? Are we not to be influenced by His divine example? Are we to show less patience with our fellowmen than God, the infinite Lord of all things, deigns to show toward us, who are infinitely below Him, and His unworthy and lowly servants and dependents? Perish the thought.

O! How happy are those, who go through life exercising charity and showing kindness on all sides, who sympathize with every sorrow, and assuage every grief, who have a cheering word for the mourner and a helping hand for those in trouble. Not only do they receive an abundant reward in this world, by reason of the love they awaken, and the joy that they scatter broadcast, and the gratitude that they enkindle in the hearts of their neighbors, but—what is infinitely more important—they draw down upon themselves the affection of Almighty God, they dispose His Heart to love them yet more, they render Him more and more favorable to them, and they prepare for themselves, on the last dread day of Judgment, a more and more merciful sentence.

Let us then, while there is still time, examine ourselves upon our love of the brethren, and see if we cannot do far more than we are doing at present in this matter to win the approval and the commendation of our supreme Judge.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Church and State

Text:—"And Jesus saith to them: Whose image and superscription is this? They say to Him, Caesar's. Then He saith to them, Render to Caesar therefore the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."—(*From the Gospel of the day.*)

DEARLY beloved brethren: Philosophers tell us that "Man is a rational animal." And this seems to be a very accurate definition. In so far as his body and its various organs and their functions are concerned, man is as truly an animal as the horse, which he drives, or as the kine, that feed in the meadows. But, then we must remember that in addition to his complicated body, "so wonderfully and fearfully made" (Ps. 139), as the Scripture tells us, man possesses an immortal and a rational soul. It is just this that makes all the difference. It is just this that raises him above all the rest of the visible world, and that secures for him dominion over the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, and over the blind forces of nature. It is this gift of reason residing in his soul that places the crown of authority upon his head, and the sceptre of rule in his hands.

The brute beast is made for this earth alone. It can aspire to nothing higher, it has no needs but what the earth can supply, and is wholly unconscious of any joys or pleasures, but such as are earthly. The beast is perfectly content with its present surroundings, for it knows of nothing greater or higher or better.

But man is totally differently constituted. He feels that he is but a pilgrim and a stranger upon earth, and that he has not here a lasting city. He knows full well that he is not created to grovel upon the ground, to indulge his bodily appetites, nor to seek his happiness in material and perishable things. On the con-

trary, he knows that his home is an eternal, not a temporal, one; that his Father is God Himself; and that the heavens above are his final and permanent dwelling-place; and that being made for the Infinite, he can never find complete rest in anything finite, nor in anything less than God.

But, my brethren, if man is destined to live for ever in Heaven, he is destined, for a time at least, to live upon earth; in fact, his earthly career is intended to fit him for his heavenly one. Hence man may be said to live two different lives at the same time: his natural life and his supernatural life, each of which imposes upon him its own particular duties and obligations. Now, with a view to assist man in carrying out these two sets of duties, God has established two great societies; one we generally speak of as the Church and the other as the State. Each of us is, at one and the same time a subject of the Church and a subject of the State, and we are charged and burdened with duties toward both. This much is clearly implied by St. Peter, who commands us not only to "fear God," but also to "honor the King" (1 St. Peter ii.) ; and yet more clearly and emphatically by our Divine Lord Himself, when He said: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Matt. xxii. 20.)

Each of these two Societies, the Church and the State, is complete in itself and independent of the other. Each has its ends and aims. The State is concerned with man's present and earthly welfare. It exists to secure to each member of the commonwealth the opportunity and the liberty to develop his natural talents and to exercise his natural abilities. It maintains order. It punishes crime. It administers justice. It protects the weak from oppression; it defends the rights of each; and, furthermore, it undertakes, for the public good, a great number of important tasks, which individuals, when left to themselves, could never accomplish. Thus, it lights up and drains our cities; it supplies them with water; it builds bridges, makes

railways, establishes the daily post, and opens out communications between one part of the country and another. Further, it provides for our national defence, *i. e.*, for the army and the navy; and arranges treaties with foreign Governments, and so forth. In short, the State is a necessity, if man is to rise above the condition of the savage, and to become properly educated and civilized. And, as man receives so many advantages from the State, so he, on his side, is obliged by the moral law, to respect the civil authority, and to obey its laws, so long as it does not step beyond its proper boundaries.

Some there are who would persuade us that the authority of the State springs from the people, and that the civil government possesses no sanction beyond that which is conferred by the multitude over whom it rules. This is not the teaching of the Catholic Church. She lays it down with unmistakable clearness that *all* authority, even purely civil authority, is from God. "By me," says the Almighty, "kings reign and lawgivers decree just things. By me princes rule and the mighty decree justice." (Prov. viii. 15, 16.) Yet more explicit still are the inspired words used by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans. "There is no power but from God; and those that are, are ordained by God." (Romans xiii. 1-4.)

Man is so constituted by nature and character that it would be impossible for multitudes to live together in great cities and kingdoms, and to form vast and orderly communities, unless they submitted to some such authority. Archbishop Ireland compares civil society to "a city built upon a mountain, within whose bosom rage a thousand volcanic fires." For a nation is made up of millions of human beings, differing from one another and opposed to one another in character, inclinations, interests, ambitions and aims. In order that they may dwell in harmony, mutual sacrifices are essential. The passions of men, when left to themselves, acknowledge no control. These passions must be repressed. The poor envy the rich; inferiors hate

superiors; the strong would use their strength to oppress the weak; the proud and ambitious would seek to rise to opulence or fame on the ruins of their fellows, and each would seek his own personal advantage at the expense of his neighbor. From such disasters humanity must be rescued. How? By the just exercise and control of a competent authority. Where such authority exists there will be order, peace, and civilization. Where no such authority exists or where no such authority is recognized there will be crime, disorder, discontent and chaos.

Now, in order that this authority may have full scope and exercise its proper influence, it must be recognized and accepted by the governed as rightful and just. Majorities possess no inherent rights, even though they may possess power. And mere brute force and violence, in the absence of right, is pure despotism; and despotism never succeeds. On the contrary, despotism engenders resistence, provokes revolutions, and leads to the perpetual hatching of plots. It is only in so far as men recognize the lawfulness of authority and their duty of obedience that the civil power will yield its legitimate fruits. Once persuade the multitude that God is watching over them, that all authority emanates from Him, and is Divine, and that God's majesty encircles with its rays magistrates, legislators, and rulers of nations, and then the people will obey the law and willingly make the requisite sacrifices. With us Catholics this duty is very clear and indeed unmistakable. St. Paul, inspired by the Holy Ghost, teaches that disobedience to the civil authorites is a sin and a crime. His language is most emphatic and energetic. He tells us that "He that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist purchase to themselves damnation." "Wherefore," he adds, "be subject of necessity, not only for wrath, but also for conscience's sake." (Rom. xiii. 2-5.) No words could be stronger or more authoritative than these.

And this is no real hardship, for, provided we do our

duty and wrong no man, we need not stand in any fear of the civil arm. What says St. Paul? "Wilt thou," he asks, "be afraid of the Power?" He answers his own question, saying: "Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise from the same, for he is God's minister to thee for good. But if thou doest that which is evil, fear; for he beareth not the sword in vain." (Rom. xiii. 4.)

We must not infer from what has been said that God is especially addicted to any one particular form of government; or that He favors a monarchy more than a republic, or a republic more than a monarchy. No. So far as the particular system or mode of government is concerned, God is absolutely indifferent. It rests with the nation and with the people how they are to be governed. They are left perfectly free in the matter, and may choose to be ruled by an absolute monarchy, a limited monarchy, an oligarchy, a democracy, or a republic, or by any other legitimate authority. God leaves to each nation the settling of such points. For, people are differently constituted, and what best suits one nation may be most unsuitable to another.

All that we have any right to insist upon and to affirm is that the civil authority, *once properly established,* acquires a Divine right to exercise control and to dispense laws, and to hold the reins of government. And, be it monarchial or be it republican, the citizens are bound to obey it, in all things lawful, and not merely through fear, but also for conscience sake; and as having one day to render an account of their actions before the tribunal of Almighty God Himself.

We have pointed out that the civil power is from God, and its decrees binding in conscience. And this, of course, is incontestable. Yet it is true only in so far as rulers keep within their own proper province. The civil government has to do with man's temporal and earthly welfare, and with the peace and prosperity of the people in this life. It has nothing whatsoever to do with man's superior and eternal interests and pos-

sesses no right to legislate on purely Church matters.

If any government should attempt to encroach upon the Church's domain, so as to interfere or hamper its superior authority, it is acting *ultra vires,* and then it may and indeed *must* be resisted.

And this is no imaginary danger, as history abundantly testifies.

Strictly speaking, there should be no friction between Church and State. There is no reason, but man's perversity, why the civil and the ecclesiastical powers should not work together in harmony. Their respective spheres are quite distinct, and yet, while keeping within their own boundaries, each can help on and advance the interests of the other.

Indeed, we may gather from history in how many ways the spiritual influence of the Church has already helped to promote the end of civil government, which is the temporal well-being of man. Thus, to give a few instances, the Church's doctrine that all men are equal, and all brothers of Jesus Christ, has gradually permeated men's minds and has done a great deal toward inducing governments to abolish slavery. So, too, the Church has helped much to raise the condition of women, by teaching that marriage is a Sacrament as well as a contract; by proclaiming it to be indissoluble, and also by exhibiting and drawing attention to the exalted dignity of Mary, the Mother of God, and the most blessed amongst women. The Church has also exercised considerable influence in restraining tyranny and oppression, by reminding men of the final Judgment, when God will deal with and punish all injustice and iniquity. The poor and the downtrodden have also gained much from the State, because the Church has taught those in authority, that all men, whether rich or poor, whether noble or ignoble, are children of the same Divine Father in Heaven, and that whatever is done fore the least and most needy will be taken by Jesus Christ as being done to Himself. In these and in countless other ways the Church has been of real, though indirect

assistance to the State, and has furthered the temporal no less than the eternal interests of man. And as the State owes much to the Church, so the Church may owe something to the State. For each can legislate for its subjects in such a manner as (without departing from its proper sphere and end) to promote the end of the other.

But, alas! The State does not always keep within its lawful boundaries. History shows that the civil power will often usurp the place of the Church, and hinder her rather than help her in the discharge of her most sacred duties. In such cases the State has to be resisted and opposed. Instances meet us from the very dawn of ecclesiastical history, and continue with greater or less frequency throughout the ages. Thus, we read in the Acts of the Apostles, how SS. Peter and John were apprehended and cast into prison because they preached the doctrine taught by Jesus Christ. The following morning they were brought before the tribunals and were commanded not to speak any more in the name of Christ, nor to promulgate His doctrine. But here the local authorities were clearly exceeding their lawful powers. Though the Apostles were ready to obey the magistrates in all things that appertained to their jurisdiction, they could not listen to, nor accept, nor act upon an immoral and iniquitous law. The Apostles boldly answered their judges by exclaiming: "If it be lawful, in the sight of God to hear *you* rather than *God,* judge ye." (Acts iv. 19.) So, heeding not the threats of their persecutors, they went on preaching and proclaiming the doctrine of Christ, even though they were ill treated and vilified, and finally cast into prison, and put to death for the Faith that was in them.

So it has been from the beginning even until now. Good Catholics have always been ready and willing to serve the State, to defend the State, and to obey the State, so long as the State recognized its own limitations and refrained from usurping the authority of the Church. But if the State trespasses beyond her

proper boundaries and begins to dictate in matters affecting Faith and Religion, if it seeks to force men's consciences, then it is simply attempting to exercise an authority that in no way belongs to it.

Consider the country of England in the sixteenth century. So long as the State was content to exercise its own proper functions it found no more loyal subjects than Catholics. But the State grew impatient of the spiritual power of the Church. King Henry VIII. and Queen Elizabeth were not satisfied to rule over men's bodies. They would rule over their souls as well. Their unfortunate English subjects were not allowed to follow the dictates of their own conscience. They could not call even their souls their own. They were commanded, under pain of a most cruel death, to abandon their most cherished beliefs: to denounce Holy Mass; to cast aside five out of seven Sacraments; to deny the jurisdiction of the Pope, even in purely spiritual matters, and to attend the new Protestant services. It was made high treason to say Mass, or to assist at Mass, or even to harbor a priest, and the old religion which had been the glory of England for a thousand years and had secured for her the charter of her liberties, was now suddenly and absolutely banned and forbidden by act of Parliament. Bishops, cardinals, priests and religious, as well as laymen and laywomen were deliberately thrown into prison, tortured and put to a cruel and violent death, solely because they affirmed, as did the Apostles of old, that "one must obey God rather than man," and that while rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, they must also render to God the things that are God's. The noblest heads rolled on the block. The most saintly of the king's subjects were hanged, drawn, and quartered, because they loved God and His truth more than life itself.

But the particular point on which we desire to lay special stress is that these very martyrs, these men who were put to a most horrible death, were really most loyal and exemplary citizens. In all matters

over which the State exercised *lawful* jurisdiction, they were ever ready and glad to obey. Even that iniquitous and masterful sovereign, Henry VIII., and his cruel daughter, Queen Elizabeth, they openly recognized as their legitimate sovereigns, and they expressed themselves ready to submit to them in all things lawful. It was only when these rulers claimed sovereignty over the Church of God, and over men's consciences, that they refused to yield.

This is made manifest in a most marked way, in their trials. We will give but an instance or two, though it would be easy to find hundreds:

Thus blessed Thomas Cottam was condemned to death in 1582, simply because he was a priest. On arrival at the place of his execution, he was forced to look on while another priest, Father Richardson, his companion, was being hanged, cut down while still alive, and then disembowelled and quartered. Having completed his bloody work, the executioner, as was the custom, seized the severed head, and holding it up all streaming with blood toward the multitude, who had gathered to see the inhuman sight, cried out: "God save the Queen." At this, all eyes turned toward blessed Thomas Cottam, to see how he would be affected. But he merely said: "Yes, God bless her and save her. With all my heart I wish her prosperity as my liege and sovereign Queen." But the sheriffs were not satisfied with these words. They bade him add: "And supreme head in matters ecclesiastical." To this the saintly martyr replied: "Had I put in those words, I would have been discharged two years ago. But to accept her as head of Christ's Church would be to deny my Faith and to imperil my salvation. For the rest, I have never done anything against her Majesty." Since he could not in conscience acknowledge Queen Elizabeth as supreme head of the Church, his fate was sealed, and like his friend Richardson, he too was hanged, and then disembowelled and quartered, and his limbs hung up over

the city gates, to inspire terror into the less valiant souls.

Or consider the case of a secular priest of the name of John Shert, or Short, who suffered death on May 23, in the same year, 1582. On reaching Tyburn, the place of execution, the sheriff informed him that he was authorized to offer him his life if only he would confess himself guilty. But he boldly replied: "What! Shall I save this frail and vile carcass and damn my own soul! No! I am a Catholic. In that Faith I was born; in that Faith will I die; and here shall my blood seal it." When he had finished speaking, his tormenters asked him, tempting him, what he thought of Queen Elizabeth. Now we must remember that she was most cruel, vindictive, spiteful and unjust, and was hanging and disembowelling and quartering her Catholic subjects all over the kingdom. Yet, in spite of this, the holy martyr showed no resentment, and declared himself quite ready and willing to acknowledge her temporal authority as head of the State, which of course was really all she had any right to demand. He said in a clear voice: "I acknowledge her for my sovereign Lady and Queen, for whose prosperous estate and well-being I have always prayed." But that did not satisfy these bloodthirsty villains. So they proceeded to enquire of him "if he thought her to be supreme governor under Christ of the Church in England?" He at once replied, though he knew death would be the consequence, "I will give to Caesar that which is his; and to God that which belongs to God. The Queen is not and cannot be supreme head of the Church, nor can any other be, but the Pope." This act of sublime faith and superhuman courage was all they wanted. The executioner was told to get on with his bloody work. The saintly priest then began to pray, and then, while still commending himself to God, the cart was drawn from beneath him, his body swung from the rope, and his noble soul went to God, to receive the reward of its love and faith and constancy.

These few instances, which might be multiplied almost indefinitely, show how the State may sometimes step beyond its proper sphere and arrogate to itself powers that God has committed to His Church alone. Such usurpation must always bring trouble and conflict and suffering. And those who are responsible for it, will have a heavy account to render.

In conclusion, I would observe, that so long as the State attends to its own business, and refrains from claiming the spiritual power which God has placed in the hands of His Church, a genuine Catholic will always be found to be not only a loyal subject, but the most loyal of all. Why? Because with a Catholic, loyalty is regarded as a solemn duty; a religious obligation. If he honors the king, obeys the law, and serves his country, he does so on principle. His loyalty is not the outcome of any mere feeling or sentiment or tradition. It is not based upon his affection for a particular individual who chances to wield the supreme authority, but is founded on what he recognizes as the Law of God Himself.

In a word, a Catholic who knows that he is bound to "render to God the things that are God's," is well aware that he is equally bound, and by the same authority, "to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

On the Church's Attitude Toward Relics

Text:—"If I shall touch only His garment, I shall be healed."—(*From the Gospel of the day.*)

THE Catholic Church possesses many marks by which we may know her. One of these marks is the hostility of the world. The world hates Christ our Lord, and it hates His Church, which has been established by Him to oppose and overcome it. "If you had been of the world," He says, "the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, *therefore the world hateth you.*" . . . "Remember my word that I said to you. The servant is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted me, *they will persecute you.*" (St. John xv. 18, etc.)

Ever since its first establishment the Church has been hated, and opposed, and misrepresented, and falsely accused. Now, one of the commonest accusations that non-Catholics bring against the Church is that she is unscriptural. The Protestant sects all declare that they found their religion on the Holy Scriptures, while we, poor benightened Catholics, found ours on the word of man; that is to say, on Tradition, and on the decrees of Councils and Synods, and the utterances of Popes. Thus their great champion, Dr. Chillingworth, writes: "The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants."

This, my dear brethren, is the accusation which I wish to deal with this morning. Is there any shadow of truth in it?

So far from this accusation being well founded, it would be far truer to say that it is rather Protestants than Catholics who depart from the teaching and the practice and the spirit of the Bible; as may readily

be seen by a cursory glance at its pages. Consider, for example, the following statement made by our Lord to His Apostles: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." (John xx. 23.) Words which clearly indicate both the power of absolving from sin, and also the power of withholding forgiveness. Weigh these words well, my brethren, and then ask yourselves where this Sacramental power is more fully acknowledged, more heartily accepted, and more extensively exercised. Is it in the Catholic Church or is it among the multitudinous Protestant sects?

Or read the following prophetic utterance of Malachias: "From the rising of the sun even to the going down, my name is great among the Gentiles (to the Jews, all who were not of their own race were 'Gentiles'), and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to my name a clean oblation, for my name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of Hosts." (Malach. i. 11.) What is this "clean oblation"? To what, indeed, can it refer if not to the precious Body and Blood of Christ daily offered up in the Eucharistic sacrifice? The words clearly point to the Holy Mass. Now, what is there in any Protestant church that can be taken as the fulfilment of this prophecy? Where among the Protestant sects shall we discover the "sacrifice," the "clean oblation" offered up to God, from the rising to the setting of the sun? In the Catholic Church the fulfilment of the prophecy is obvious and manifest, but nowhere else.

Here is another passage from the Bible—an exhortation of an Apostle—which is indeed obeyed by the Catholic Church, but which remains a dead letter among our very scriptural friends. I refer to the following instructions given by St. James: "If any man be sick among you, let him bring in the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil, in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick man, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he be in sins they shall be forgiven

him." (James v. 14, 15.) In Extreme Unction, one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church, we find the most complete interpretation and the most obvious fulfilment of these words. Whenever any one is seriously sick amongst us we at once send for the priest, and he comes, and anoints and prays, and invokes the name of the Lord, just as St. James directed. Yes, my brethren, these words possess a meaning with us, but in the Protestant sects there is no sacrament of Extreme Unction, and the exhortation of St. James falls on deaf ears.

Many further examples might be cited to prove that, in spite of all their boasts, Protestants are not nearly so scriptural as Catholics. I will, however, confine myself to just one more illustration, suggested by to-day's Gospel. I refer to our practice of honoring and venerating relics. Non-Catholics laugh at our attitude towards such things, and profess to be unable to understand the use or even the sense of preserving and honoring the dessicated bones, and the cast-off garments of virgins, confessors, martyrs and others, as though they could do us any good or bring us any aid. These very superior people travel through Italy, France and Spain and other Catholic countries and make merry over the famous shrines and the costly reliquaries that they meet in the course of their wanderings, and are positevely distressed at the services and processions and the bowings and genuflections that go on, when some more than usually famous relic is exposed for public veneration.

Yes! Alas, it is only too true that such practices do not approve themselves to the judgment of the world. But "the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God," and we need not trouble ourselves to conform to its false and purely human standards. Protestants are ready enough to admit that Christ can and did work miracles. Some will go so far even as to admit that the more favored of His followers may be made mediums of graces and favors. But they draw the line at inanimate objects. They cannot

persuade themselves that the water of Lourdes, for example, can be, under any circumstances, one whit better than the water of the Loire or of the Liffy, though the Scripture itself shows us how the waters of one place may be better than the waters of another, since the Bible itself informs us that Naaman was cured of leprosy by the waters of the Jordan, though no river in Damascus could do him the slightest good. (4 Kings.) Nor can they imagine that the dead bones of one man can possess any more virtue than those of another, though here again *it is the Scripture itself* that informs us that the bones of Eliseus wrought miracles not accorded to the bones of ordinary mortals. In their eyes it is childish to wear a fragment of the true cross, or a morsel of linen or cloth saturated with the blood of—say—a St. Polycarp or a St. Flavian. They are far too practical, they will tell us, and far too full of sterling common sense to be led into such extravagances. In fact, they are quite as ready to laugh us to scorn, for what they call our credulity, as the Jews, in to-day's Gospel, were ready to laugh Jesus Christ to scorn. Yet, strange to say, they nevertheless flatter themselves that they follow the Scriptures so much more faithfully than we do! We will examine this point to-day and see who are in sober truth more scriptural, they our ourselves.

The Evangelist informs us, in the Gospel just read, that Our Blessed Lord, according to His usual custom, was journeying through the country, on foot, followed by a large concourse of people, attracted, no doubt, by the sweetness of his presence, and the wisdom and beauty of His doctrine. Now, among these was a poor woman, suffering from a distressing and persistent malady. Though St. Matthew does not explicitly say so, yet we may prudently infer that she had tried every natural means to cure herself, and that she had consulted the best available physicians, for the complaint had clung to her for twelve long years, and it is not likely that she would have rested unconcerned under her trouble for all that time. However, in spite

of her efforts she was still a victim to the same complaint. Now, at last, she realized her opportunity. Jesus Christ, the wonder-worker, was passing. He whose voice had stilled the storm on the Lake of Galalee, whose mere touch had startled the dead back to life, and who had proved His dominion over all nature, was at hand. Why could He not cure her? She would at all events invoke His mercy. But how was she to attract His attention? What chance was there for her to secure audience, while the crowd eddied and surged around Him! A personal audience was not necessary, for "virtue went out from Him, and healed all." (St. Luke vi. 19.) Mere contact would be enough, if only it were accompanied by lively faith and childlike trust. "Yes," she said within herself, "If I touch but the hem of His garment, I shall be healed."

In the garment itself there was no inherent virtue. It was but a piece of cloth or other woven material, possessing no supernatural power. It differed not from other cloth; or, if it differed, it differed only in this, that it was worn by Him, and belonged to Him. That was its only merit, yet it was merit enough. Accordingly, she approached Him in a spirit of the most absolute faith. Not indeed obtruding herself into His presence, but humbly coming behind Him, she just placed her hand upon the hem of His garment, and was immediately cured. "And Jesus turning and seeing her, said, Be of good heart, daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour."

Here two points must be kept clearly in mind. Firstly, we have to consider her faith; that is to say, her strong inward conviction that the mere touch of His robe would heal her. "If I touch but the hem of His garment, I shall be healed." And, secondly, we have to bear in mind that this act of true, unwavering faith was the real cause of her cure, as Our Lord Himself declared: "Thy FAITH hath made thee whole." The material cloth is not to be regarded as a charm

or a talisman. It could impart no cure by any intrinsic quality it might possess. No; the cure was a reward accorded by God to the faith accompanying and indeed evoking the act. But, dearly beloved brethren, God's hand is not shortened. He is as able and as merciful at present as in the days of His earthly pilgrimage. If, then, we touch a relic of Jesus Christ, say, for instance, a piece of the true cross, or a morsel of the Holy Coat of Treves, with as lively a faith and with the like dispositions, why should it be thought preposterous that a cure should be effected? It may be objected that many touch, but that few are cured. True. But precisely the same objection might be urged in the case mentioned in to-day's Gospel. Many of those who touched Him, and pressed against Him, still remained in their infirmities, whether of body or soul. And why? Because the great majority are wanting in the requisite dispositions. It is not the touch but the faith accompanying the touch, that produces the miracle. Such as really have the faith that filled the heart of the poor woman spoken of in to-day's Gospel may easily meet with her reward also, and have their ailments cured; and Christ may easily address to them the words He addressed to her—"Thy faith hath made thee whole."

That even inanimate and purely material things may be made the instruments of all kinds of favors and blessings is so clearly proved in Holy Scripture that it is somewhat difficult to understand how our non-Catholic countrymen should wonder and exclaim because we claim a like efficacy for such things even nowadays. No one can take up a copy of the Bible and read its inspired pages without meeting many examples. Turn, for instance, to the fourth Book of Kings, chapter the second. There we are told that Eliseus took the mantle of the great servant of God, Elias, after he had been taken up into Heaven in a fiery chariot, and treasured it up as a most precious legacy and a most holy relic. But this is not all. The Scripture goes on to inform us that this relic possessed

such virtues that the most marvellous wonders were wrought by its means. It tells us, for example, how on one occasion Eliseus, wishing to travel into a certain country, found his passage stopped by the waters of the Jordan. What did he do? He at once bethought himself of the relic of the blessed prophet Elias. Standing upon the banks of that famous river, and "invoking the God of Elias, he struck the waters with the mantle," and behold! they were forthwith divided hither and thither, so that Eliseus was able to pass without further let or hindrance. (4 Kings ii. 14.)

This incident is startling enough, yet a few pages further on (Chap. xiii.) we read of a much more remarkable example of the power of relics, when God wishes to do honor to His saints. I refer to the dead man brought back instantly to life by the mere touch of the dessicated bones of Eliseus. According to the narrator, certain robbers came from the land of Moab, carrying with them the corpse of a man recently deceased. When they reached the sepulchre of Eliseus, not wishing to be encumbered any longer, they threw the dead body into it. But no sooner did it come in contact with the bones of the prophet than the dead man "came to life, and stood upon his feet." (4 Kings xiii. 21.) Again we turn to our scriptural critics and ask if the dried bones of Eliseus can work such wonders and restore even the dead to life, why should not the bones and other relics of more modern saints enjoy a like privilege, when God sees good thereby to manifest to the world their sanctity and virtue? Is God less powerful than He was, or less willing to give evidence to the virtue and holiness of His saints? Impossible. Non-Catholics sometimes endeavor to evade a difficulty by drawing a distinction between the Old and the New Testament, and would persuade us that a change took place after the coming of Christ. But this answer will scarcely avail, since we have illustrations and examples in the New Testament just as striking and just as marvellous as any to be met with in the Old. Nothing indeed runs more exactly

parallel than the practice and belief of the Church in the time of the Apostles, as described in the Acts, and the practice and belief of the Catholic Church at the present day, in regard even to the use and the veneration of relics. One of the most famous and most highly esteemed of the saints in the first century of the Christian era was St. Paul. He was consequently greatly beloved and most highly esteemed by the faithful. Knowing him to have been a great Apostle and a great saint, they not only asked his prayers, and sought his blessing, but they showed a reverence for everything that had belonged to him, or that had even touched him or been connected with him. And they sought favors and graces both for body and for soul by the reverent use of these purely material objects. "So that," as we are expressly informed by St. Luke (Acts xix.), "they brought handkerchiefs and aprons from his body to the sick" and the feeble. And for what purpose? Well, what possible purpose could a handkerchief or an apron, a remnant of simple linen or cloth, serve? Unless there be some hidden virtue in it arising from its connection with the saint; unless, in other words, it is to be considered as a relic, we should reply: None. No. As St. Luke clearly infers, its efficacy was wholly supernatural. He tells us how these objects were applied to the sick, and how, as a consequence, "the diseases departed from them and the wicked spirits went out of them." (Acts xix. 12.) This passage provides us with the clearest *scriptural* authority for the use of relics, and proves as well as illustrates their efficacy and power under the all-ruling providence of God. What St. Luke narrates of St. Peter is, if possible, more wondrous still. The virtue and authority of the Prince of the Apostles was such that is was not necessary even to apply handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched his body. His mere shadow falling on the sick effected all sorts of cures, insomuch that the inspired writer observes that "they brought forth those who were ill and placed them on beds and couches along the streets and public

ways, so that when St. Peter came "his shadow at the least might fall upon them, and they might be delivered from their infirmities." (Acts v. 15.)

If God, in His divine wisdom, was pleased to communicate such wholly miraculous efficacy to the handkerchiefs and aprons, and even to the mere shadow of His saints, while they were still in this world, and before their final triumph, how much more may we not expect Him to attach virtue to their relics, now that they have won their crowns and are reigning in glory with Him in Heaven. While upon earth they were not wholly and entirely free from imperfection and spiritual defilement. They were still "in the way" and "fighting the good fight." They were not even absolutely secure of final victory. If even then, while unconfirmed in grace, the mere touch of their handkerchiefs could produce such results, surely now that they are seated on thrones in Heaven their power will not be less!

But the Church preserves and treasures up the relics of the great saints and servants of God, not merely on account of the wonders that are frequently worked by their means, but for many other reasons besides. In the first place, because such honor is due to those whom God has so highly favored. In the second place, because the sight of such objects helps to stimulate our zeal and keeps the memory of such heroes ever green. We are still human. We are still influenced by our senses; by what we can see and touch. We may be fully aware that St. Peter was cast into prison and that he was cruelly bound with chains. Yes. But when we actually visit the Mamertine prison and descend into the narrow cell where he converted his two guards, Processus and Martineanus, and yet more, when we can actually gaze on the very chains (*Consult* Breviary—Aug. 1st—St. Petr. ad Vincula—II. Nocturn) that bruised his flesh and which were struck off by angelic hands (Acts xii. 7), and even touch them and feel their weight and strength, we begin, I will not say to believe more firmly, but at least to realize more

vividly and clearly all that he suffered and put up with for the grand old faith which is ours at this very day; and his martyrdom becomes a greater and a more touching reality than before.

It is the same in a greater or lesser degree with every other saint. In England at least we are familiar with the touching history of Blessed Thomas Moore, once Lord High Chancellor, and a bosom friend of Henry VIII. Take him as an instance. Well, we admire his courage and sterling constancy in the things of God. We are edified by the accounts of his penances and self-imposed mortifications. True. But when in addition to this abstract knowledge of the saint's life we are invited to look upon the identical hair shirt that he was accustomed to wear under his robes of state, and can handle and examine it for ourselves and feel its rude coarse texture, we become far more deeply penetrated with a sense of his holiness and of his love of the cross, and our hearts grow warm as his figure seems to arise more lifelike before us. If a lock of hair or a withered flower that once belonged to some earthly lover, will excite emotions too deep for words, and sometimes even move strong men to tears, shall we dispute the value of the relics of the saints to excite our affections, to stimulate our pity and to lift our thoughts to heaven? If, however, all that is even distantly connected with the saints and martyrs is respected and held in veneration, their actual bodies claim a yet higher consideration. Not merely are they the temples of the Holy Ghost; not merely are they the very instruments of the sufferings and mortifications which have merited so great a reward, but they are destined one day to rise from their ashes and to occupy a position of altogether special glory in the Kingdom of God. "They shall shine as stars for all eternity," (Dan. xii. 3,) says the Spirit of God, and again: "They shall shine as the sun in the Kingdom of the Father." (Matt. xiii. 43.) But as "star differeth from star," in glory, so shall the just differ one from another, in the firmament of Heaven.

If the least and the lowest of all the saved shall exceed in splendor and beauty all that imagination can picture, or mind conceive, what shall we say of the immeasurably greater beauty and magnificence of the great saints and valiant soldiers of Christ whose whole life on earth has been a victory and a triumph! Who shall attempt to describe the supreme loveliness and exquisite grace and splendor even of their corporal forms! The attempt would be vain. Let it suffice to remark that, this fact constitutes one of the reasons which induce us to respect in so special a manner the personal relics of virgins, confessors, and martyrs, and of all, in a word, whose sanctity, confirmed by miracles, has raised them to a place upon our altars. Whatever honor and respect we may show, is but trifling as compared with the honor God Himself will show them, when He raises them from the grave, and clothes them with glory and immortality.

The practice of venerating the relics of the saints, and of recognizing in them even a certain virtue and spiritual power, has nothing in it which is either new or unscriptural. As we have shown, it is as old and older than Christianity, and fully sanctioned by the Bible, no less than by that world-wide Church which is the only infallible and authorative interpreter of its inspired pages. Let us yield ourselves up to her safe teaching, and rejoice to have about us the relics of the saints, that we may be the oftener reminded of their merits and their virtues, and be spurred on to walk in their footsteps, and to emulate their example; until, at last, by God's grace, we come to share with them the joys and delights of Paradise.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Judgment

Text:—"They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty: and He shall send His angels with a trumpet and a great voice, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest parts of the heavens to the uttermost bounds of them."—(*From the Gospel of the day.*)

YOU will notice, my dear brethren, that the Church both begins and ends the ecclesiastical year by setting before her children a vivid and striking picture of the last, general, Judgment. She does so, because, in her wisdom, she well realizes the immense efficacy and power of that solemn subject to sober and steady our inconstant minds, and to fortify our wills amid all the temptations and seductions of the world. It will be well for us then, at this season, to enter into the spirit of the Church, and to reflect seriously on the minute account we shall one day have to render to God, of our entire life, from the first moment in which we became capable of sin, until our final departure from this world.

Unfortunately, man bestows but little thought on such matters. In fact, the vast majority of our fellow creatures live and act as though this were the only life. All their thoughts are directed toward the interests of the passing hour. They are wholly taken up with their business, or profession, and the pleasures and amusements and diversions that the world provides. The visible world, with all its attractions and distractions, thrusts itself upon their attention, whether they will it or no. It awakens their desires. It stimulates their curiosity; it excites their passions, and makes a continual appeal to all their senses. In short, it *insists* upon being listened to, and obtrudes itself upon them, in a thousand different ways, till,

little by little, the great, eternal, changeless, invisible world grows dimmer and dimmer, and at last fades utterly from their minds. And, after all, this is but natural, for man's capacity is but limited. Once he allows the temporal and the tangible to engross him, he will very soon find that there is no room left for the eternal and the spiritual. Among the multitudes of busy, toiling business men, how many shall we find who thoroughly realize the sovereignty of God, and their absolute and continuous dependence upon Him, from day to day, and from hour hour? Go into the great cities, and teeming hives of industry, where millions are gathered together. Watch them immersed in business and trade and professional duties; and ask yourself, how many amongst them are in any degree conscious of their personal responsibilities? How many advert to the fact that an accurate record is kept of every idle word they utter, and of every sinful thought that they entertain, and that a day is fast approaching, on which they will have to answer to the Supreme Judge for every event of their life?

Men, for the most part, think and speak and act as though there were no death threatening them, no omniscient Judge ready to examine them, no hell to avoid, no Heaven to gain! It is clearly the duty then of the Church, ever so solicitous for the spiritual welfare of her children, to arouse them from their lethargy, and to direct their attention to these solemn truths. To-day, my dear brethren, she speaks to you by my unworthy lips, and urges you, while there is yet time, to enter seriously into yourselves, to put your house in order, and to make ready to give an account of your stewardship.

There are, of course, two distinct Judgments awaiting us: the private one and the public one. The first takes place in the very moment of death, so soon as ever the last breath leaves the body. Men perish in all sorts of places, and under the most varied conditions and surroundings. But wheresoever death meets them, in that same spot will their eternal and irrevo-

cable sentence be pronounced. One man may be drowned in the depths of the sea, another may be buried alive in some profound coal mine, another may be devoured in some terrible conflagration, and so forth. It makes no difference. Wherever the soul separates itself from the tabernacle of the body, there God will meet it, examine it, and consign it forthwith to Heaven, to purgatory, or to hell.

When an earthly offender is brought before a human tribunal, the examination is often long and involved, and much time is taken up in arguing and disputing and in cross-questioning witnesses, before the judge is able to arrive at any final decision. But all such delays are due to the imperfection of earthly methods, and the limited capacities of judge and jury. They have no counterpart, therefore, in the divine judgment that takes place at the hour of our death. There the condition of the soul is seen at once. Its whole career is revealed and lit up as by a single flash, and the sentence is passed, and executed in a space of time far shorter than it takes to record it.

To worldlings, whose thoughts seldom if ever stray beyond the present life, this peremptory call to judgment often comes as a sudden and most awful shock. In a moment, and when they are least expecting it, the dread summons resounds in their unexpectant ears. The guilty and the innocent are alike hurried away without notice or warning, from the counting-house or the stock-exchange, from the bank or place of business, the banqueting hall or the ball-room, the drinking saloon or the house of ill-fame, to find themselves standing alone and naked, trembling and fearful, face to face with that supreme and infinite God, whom they have so grieviously and so thoughtlessly offended. Yes! The Great Master, whose tasks they have neglected, whose interests they have scarcely considered, and whose commands they have disobeyed, has come at last to demand a strict account of their stewardship. If during life they have disowned His authority and ignored His claims, they can do this no

longer, for He appears before them now, not as a weak suffering man, "clothed in infirmity," but as the Almighty King of Heaven and earth, with full power to assert His rights, and to vindicate justice and to punish, as they deserve, all who have broken His law, defied His authority, and followed the unruly desires of their hearts.

So soon as ever judgment has been delivered, the soul is borne to the place destined to receive it. Either amid the inexpressible delights of Heaven, or else amid the excruciating torments of hell (as the case may be), it will await the resurrection of the dead and its final reunion with its body. Then, on the last day, the dead will rise from their myriad graves, and all men as well as all angels will be summoned before their Lord and Creator to assist at the General Judgment, and to witness the final triumph of the good, and the discomfiture and eternal despair of the wicked. The entire human race will be in attendance. Every human being that has entered into this world, from the time of Adam to the final crack of doom, will take a part in that stupendous assize. Men of all periods, and of all races, languages, customs, traditions, and religions will be gathered together before the Great White Throne, to hear the sentence passed upon each individual soul.

Then and there all the false judgments of this world will be put right. All those who have been falsely accused, and wrongfully sentenced, and shamefully treated, will be fully and completely vindicated before the eyes of all men. In this life, the wicked often prosper, while the good suffer and are oppressed. The true servants of God and devoted followers of the Crucified are calumniated, insulted, ill-treated and even put to death, while the unscrupulous violaters of God's law enjoy the riches and the honor and the good things of this earth, and indulge in every luxury and extravagance. But on the last day all such wrongs will be set right, and God will show that He is the God of Justice, by punishing the bad and re-

warding the good, and by rendering to each one according to his works. Then will He make the crooked ways straight, and the rough ways smooth, and restore order out of chaos, and prove Himself to be an infinitely holy and infinitely impartial Judge.

But let us now pass from generalities, and consider the General Judgment as it affects ourselves individually. Let me ask each one of you now seated before me, to enter into yourself, and to reason thus: "Yes. I too shall be one of that vast assembly. However little I may think of it, or advert to it, nevertheless that awful day will come, and I shall stand trembling before the dreadful judgment seat, in sight of men and angels. I, too, must submit to that searching examination, and must render to God an accurate and minute account of the whole of my life. He will call me before Him, and pass in review all my thoughts, words, deeds and omissions. Nothing will be overlooked or forgotten; nothing will be passed over or left unobserved. Every evil desire, every idle word, every secret motion of my heart will be scrutinized and weighed in the balance of the Sanctuary. Nothing will prove too small or too trivial to escape the attention of the Infinite Judge." O! What a thought! If a common murderer fears to be brought before a finite and earthly judge; if he trembles and grows pale as he stands in the dock, before his accusers, awaiting the sentence of death, how infinitely more terrified will the sinner be, when he has to take his stand before the dread Lord of Heaven and earth, whom he has outraged by his sins.

For, who is this Judge? He is no mere creature, but the eternal and uncreated God, before whom the very angels veil their faces, and the strong pillars of Heaven tremble. Well nigh two thousand years ago, He came upon earth lowly and humble, and clothed in our frail nature, in order to inspire confidence and to win our love, and to encourage is to follow after Him along the way of perfection, which is ever the way of obedience and self-denial. But now He ap-

pears in tremendous power and majesty, borne on the clouds of Heaven, accompanied by countless angels, to deal out even-handed justice, and to assert to the full His absolute authority and dominion.

Woe to the sinner, who is brought before Him, with his sins still staining his soul. Woe to the breaker of God's commandments, who has allowed the period of repentance to go by without seeking to be reconciled with his outraged Lord, by means of a good confession, and who has departed out of life with the guilt of mortal sin still clinging to him. For, then nothing can save him from suffering the full penalty of his crimes: and hell must necessarily be his portion forever. And out of the bottomless pit there is no redemption.

Consider the chief characteristics and qualities of the Judge.

1. He is omniscient. He knows all things. He sees, as though actually present, every act and event of your life, from the very first moment in which He created you. Your whole earthly career stands out before Him as on a chart. He knows every trial, every temptation, every fault and failing, every danger and difficulty, that ever arose to try your obedience or to prove the strength of your loyalty. All your struggles and efforts to overcome passion, as well as all your success and failures, your victories and defeats will be weighed and considered, punished or rewarded. Nor is He like man, who may indeed observe the external acts, but who cannot read the secret motions and interior springs of action. No! God considers not only the labors you have undertaken and the tasks you have set yourself, for His sake, but He also considers the motives that prompted your every action, and measures, with the utmost precision, the greater or less purity of your intention. Oh, how many actions, excellent in themselves, have been vitiated at their source, by the imperfections of the motives that have prompted them. How many difficult and dangerous undertaking have been accomplished, and how many

admirable schemes carried out, which have been the fruit and outcome of pride and vanity and ostentation, rather than of nobler and higher motives, and so have profited nothing. How much precious time has been squandered and misspent, in the service of the devil, the world and the flesh, rather than in the service of God; yet every instant of such time must be fully accounted for.

2. God is an incorruptible Judge. A mere human judge may sometimes be deceived or cajoled or led away by precious reasoning into passing a favorable sentence. Or he may be flattered by fair words, influenced by powerful friends, or even bribed and won over by costly presents or by promises of honors and dignities. But the Divine Judge can be neither deceived nor bribed into doing wrong, but in each case, will pass sentence in strict accordance with the demands of divine justice.

3. Further, the Sovereign Judge is not only omniscient and incorruptible, but omnipotent as well. No one can escape out of His hands. No power, whether human or angelic, can upset or change or in any way interfere with the execution of the sentence. In this world, a condemned man may sometimes effect an escape; or he may obtain a reprieve, or some disease may carry him off, or he may put an end to himself, and so cheat the gallows of its victim. But no such chances can be looked for in the next world. There, indeed, nothing is left to chance. All is carried out, to the letter, exactly as God decrees.

4. And who, on that memorable occasion, will be our accusers? First of all there will be the devil and his angels, who have sought, and alas! only too successfully, to draw us into sin. They will bear witness, before the whole world, how, on such and such a day, and in such and such a place, we listened to their suggestions and fell miserably into their toils. They will boast of their victories over us, and show how, again and again, we were prevailed upon to renounce our allegiance to God, in order to follow their evil

counsel. They will then boldly lay claim to our souls as their lawful prey, and as their property and possession. Nor will God repudiate their claims. "Since you have elected to serve the devil rather than Me," He will say to the wicked, "during your life upon earth, you may go now, and serve him in hell for all eternity." Men become the servants of him whom they obey. Those who obey the devil, in this world, acknowledge his dominion, and in punishment of their crime they will be placed under his cruel power forevermore.

5. Our holy Angel Guardian will also be called upon to bear sorrowful testimony to our many and great falls. He will recall the graces we have so shamefully abused, the many opportunities of meriting, which we have let slip by, and our constant deafness to all his holy suggestions and admonitions. In spite of all his patience and solicitude, he will have to acknowledge, perhaps, that he has, so far as we are concerned, labored in vain.

6. Then there are others, too, who will lift up their voices to condemn us, and to call for vengeance upon us, on that dreadful day. I refer to the many souls, whom we have shocked and scandalized by our unmortified lives: the companions whom we have led astray, and the neighbors and acquaintances whom we have encouraged to commit sin, by reason of our own bad example. How shall we feel, when we see them rising up to upbraid us, and to accuse us as the author of their misfortunes and the cause of their damnation. What will be our feeling when they begin to point their accusing fingers at us, and to say: "But for you I might have been saved. But for your evil counsel and depraved example, I might have received a merciful sentence. But now, because of you, I am lost! Curse the day when first I met you! Curse the day when you laid a snare for my feet, and when I weakly followed you along the slippery path of sin." Alas! Alas! My dear brethren: Our own sins we may wash out with tears of sorrow, but we have no con-

trol over the sins which we cause, or at least occasion, in others.

7. But our chief accuser, and the most terrible by far, will be our own conscience. In this life we are ever ready to make excuses for our faults. We explain away our worst excesses, and close our eyes to their gravity, and dismiss them as of little consequence. This is because we are blind and ignorant and cannot appreciate the majesty of God. But in the "day of wrath," we shall see things as they really are. God will cast the brightness of His countenance upon us, and the true nature of our sins, with all their deformity and ingratitude, will be brought to light. Every neglect, every failing, every offence and crime that has ever disgraced our lives, will stand out in true relief, and be manifested in its true colors. So that, if we are finally condemned to eternal torment, one thing is quite certain, namely, we shall see and recognize and acknowledge the full justice of the sentence, and admit that we have thoroughly merited our appalling fate. Yes. Though a lost soul may indeed curse God, and be devoured with rage at the torment to which he is condemned, yet, throughout it all, he will be obliged, even in spite of himself, to acknowledge that he is receiving no greater punishment than his crimes deserve. In fact, his own conscience, now spiritually enlightened, will tell him clearly that God has dealt mercifully with him: given him every chance; showered upon him His grace, and made the path of salvation easy to him, if only he had chosen to follow it. He will know that his damnation is entirely his own fault, and that it would never have been brought about, had he not spurned God's graces, turned a deaf ear to His inspirations, and deliberately preferred to follow his evil passions and inclinations rather than the voice of God. In a word, he will acknowledge that he is reprobate, because *while the choice lay before him,* he deliberately chose death rather than life; and hell rather than Heaven.

8. In conclusion, let us resolve to live with the

thought of the Judgment ever before our eyes, and strive to perform all our duties, with the consciousness that we shall one day have to render an account of them to God. O! How different would be our lives, how much more charitable our words, how much more edifying our whole conduct, if we would but bear in mind that God is a witness of all we think and say and do, and that He will come one day to repay us, by rewards or punishments, for all we have done and suffered. He will render to each of us, according to our desserts.

May we all be ready and prepared, when the Lord shall call upon us to give an account of our stewardship; and may we receive a merciful sentence at His hands. Amen.

FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, B. V. M.

The Dignity of Mary

Text:—"Hail! Full of grace: the Lord is with thee."—(*St. Luke i,* 28.)

ST. JOHN the Evangelist, wrapped in ecstasy in the Island of Patmos, beheld a wondrous vision. He saw a woman, clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. (Apoc. xii. 1.) And who is this woman? St. Ambrose and St. Augustine and other trustworthy commentators declare her to be no other than our Blessed Lady herself. She is indeed fair as the moon, and glorious as the sun, while, as St. Bernard observes, her twelve special gifts may be fitly symbolized by the glittering stars encircling her brow.

Of all pure creatures she is the most excellent and the most exalted. Her throne in Heaven is set above not merely those of the saints, but above those of the highest of the angels.

"He that is mighty," she exclaims, "has done for me great things." Truly has He done great things for her, and far greater than He has done for any other. But, no doubt, what our Lady more especially referred to, when she broke out in these inspired words, was the fact that God had chosen her to be His mother.

Such a dignity surpasses every other that could be conferred on a mere creature, since it brings the creature into the most intimate relationship with the Creator. So that, though God might have given our Lady even greater grace and greater beauty than she now possesses, since it is impossible to exhaust the resources of the infinite, yet even God could not have made her a greater or a more admirable mother, for the dignity of maternity or motherhood is measured by dignity of the child who is brought forth, and in

our Lady's case, even God would not have given her a child of greater excellence or worth, since that child is the infinite God. Hence, St. Thomas teaches that in respect to her maternity her dignity belongs to a divine order, and is of an infinite degree.

But other consequences follow. Since God's counsels are eternal, He must have determined from the very beginning to make her His mother, and as a consequence from the first He must have prepared and fitted her for the unspeakably sublime position she was one day to occupy. With this end in view, He preserved her absolutely from the stain of original sin, and filled her "full of grace" from the very first moment of her conception in the womb of St. Ann her mother.

This was no ordinary grace such as beautifies, purifies and sanctifies every child in holy Baptism; but a grace so special, so immense, so wholly exceptional that (according to the learned and saintly theologian Suarez) it surpassed that conferred upon the very highest and most glorious of the Cherubim and Seraphim; and (according to St. Alphonsus) exceeded the sum total of all the graces conferred upon all men throughout all time.

Thus our Lady emerged into life in the actual enjoyment of a greater degree of grace than that with which other saints have closed it.

But, there is another point which we must never forget, if we are to estimate our Lady's sanctity aright, *viz.:* this grace was never suffered to be idle in her soul. By reason of her perfect correspondence with it, it kept continually increasing and augmenting till it at last exceeded all calculation. For we must not forget that though the Blessed Virgin was once an infant, yet she was not like other infants. By a miracle of God's providence, it is believed by some theologians that she possessed the perfect use of reason from the moment of her conception, and a supernatural knowledge of God; so that from *that* moment she began to acquire greater and greater

graces as the time went by; and continued to increase thus in sanctity to the very end of her life. Some learned and grave theologians even go so far as to say, that this growth was not interrupted even in sleep, applying to her the words: *"Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat."* (Cant. v. 2.) I sleep, and my heart watches.

If then we consider that the initial grace she received even as a child in the womb, was richer and more abundant than that which all other saints have acquired during their whole lifetime; and if we further remember that this store, so vast to begin with, was constantly doubling and trebling and quadrupling all her life long, to her very last breath, we may form some faint notion of its immense and measureless amount, and of the wholly exceptional position she occupies in Heaven.

We, alas! often abuse grace; or forfeit it by our negligence; and even when we correspond with it, this is often only imperfectly and very partially, but she turned every grace to account, and corresponded with it most faithfully and most perfectly.

Padre Segneri remarks that even had her grace been but small to begin with, such a faithful use of it would have made it inconceivably immense by the end of her life; but since it was so immeasurable even from the outset, no one can imagine the vastness of the proportions it assumed, when at last she was assumed into Heaven.

Well may her children praise her; well may churches be erected, and altars built, and sanctuaries dedicated to her honor. Well may painter and sculptor and preacher and poet vie with one another in setting forth her excellence and in proclaiming her virtues. Well may the Church of God institute feasts in her name, and sing her praises, and glorify God, who has so honored one of our own race: bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh.

Yet not only is all the honor and veneration and love she receives from earth less than her due; but it

is but little as compared to the honor she receives from the countless myriads of the blessed who gather around her in Heaven. There, the hosts of glorious angels, that no man can number, acknowledge her as their peerless Queen and their sovereign mistress. There is none above her; there is none so beautiful or so fair or so surpassingly perfect: or so overpoweringly attractive and joy-giving among all God's creatures.

God, of course, stands on a pedestal apart—for He is the infinite, and no creature is worthy of being mentioned in the same breath. There is an infinite distance, and there must ever be, between her and Him. But among mere creatures our Lady occupies the very highest pinnacle, and stands without a rival.

And if angels and archangels. Cherubim and Seraphim delight to show her honor, how much more the saints who share with her the same human nature, and who, like her, have lived and suffered and mourned and wept as exiles on earth. With what grateful loving hearts they gather round her, who has reversed the curse of Eve; who has borne in her chaste womb and given birth to the Redeemer of the World; who suffered at the foot of the Cross more than the greatest martyrs, and whose presence now is one of the greatest sources of joy and exultation in Heaven.

S. Bernardin of Siena says that if God did not utterly destroy the world, after Adam's sin, it was owing to the love He bore to this most Holy Virgin, whose beauty and purity captivated His all-seeing eyes, even before the creation of the world. And if the saints and angels love her with so much ardor, what shall we say of her love of them? Except the infinite love of God there is no love to be compared to the love of our Blessed Lady. And if her heart goes out to all those of her spiritual children who are now gathered around her safe and secure in Heaven, neither is she unmindful of us still struggling and suffering amid innumerable dangers upon earth. Her love for us is incomparably greater than that

which we receive from any other creature. And why? Because she knows and understands incomparably better than any other what our salvation has cost her Divine Son, what He suffered in securing it, and the priceless value of His passion and of His death for us upon the Cross.

She knows how He loved us, and she would love us, were it possible, even as much. She stood by and watched while He proved His love as no human being had ever proved it. She saw Him whom she loved to destraction; whom she loved immeasurably more than herself; whom she loved as her *own* son, and her *only* son; whom she loved as the most affectionate and the most perfect of sons, and whom she loved too as her creator, her benefactor, her Lord and her God. She saw Him, I say, in whom all these strong feelings centred, stripped and thrown down on the Cross with less pity than if He had been a dog: and there foully murdered slowly and with every refinement of cruelty and indignity before her eyes. She knew He endured all willingly and for our salvation, and that no one could touch a hair of His head but by His consent.

No power could have held Him down to the hard wood; no power could have driven in the nails; no power could have extinguished the pure flame of His human life, or separated His soul from His body but the power of His immense love for His Heavenly Father and for poor fallen man.

And as no one approaches our Blessed Lord so nearly as our Blessed Lady in other respects, so no one approaches Him so nearly in the greatness of His love for us. She loves us because of His love for us, because of what He did to prove it, and her love exceeds that of all other creatures and is only less than God's.

O! What a joy to have so great and powerful an advocate in Heaven! Who will despond, who will lose courage when he can claim Mary as his friend and protectress?

Be devout to her, my brethren, place yourselves under her guidance; lay your petitions in her pure hands, that she may offer them up to her Divine Son, who will refuse her nothing.

Pray to her constantly, and invoke her name at all times, but more especially in the hour of conflict and in the darkness of temptation. Pray for us, dear Mother, now and at the hour of our death.

FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

"And the Word Was Made Flesh"

Text.—"This day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." —(*From the Gospel of the First Mass.*)

THOUGH man had rebelled against his Maker, broken His divine commandments, and forfeited all right and title to the Kingdom of Heaven, yet God was too merciful to cast him off forever without offering him a second chance. The fallen angels He decided in His awful justice, to leave to their fate, but poor, weak, erring man, who had allowed himself to be seduced by the cunning and deceit of the devil, He most compassionately determined to redeem. Now, what God does, He loves to do in the most perfect and the most generous manner. Having resolved to redeem man, He would do so by becoming man Himself, and by suffering the full penalty of sin. He took upon Himself our fallen nature, not, be it observed, because He could have rescued us from hell in no other way, but simply because in no other way could He so fully, so amply, and so completely satisfy the claims of Divine Justice, outraged by our crimes. In order that man's disobedience should be adequately atoned for, and the balance of God's justice duly adjusted, two conditions were imperatively demanded. In the first place, since it was man that sinned, so it was necessary that man should offer the satisfaction. In the second place, since the offense was, in some sort, infinite, being directed against an infinite Being, so the satisfaction must be infinite. If these two conditions were to be realized, it was essential that God Himself should become man. Why? Because had Christ, the Redeemer, been God only, He could not have suffered and died for us, and, on the other hand, had He been man only, or even an angel, or a crea-

ture of any kind, His sufferings could not have been of infinite worth or efficacy. They would have been wholly disproportioned to the offense, and, in consequence, of no avail.

Let us thank and glorify God for His infinite mercy and compassion in thus descending to our lowly estate, and in deigning to clothe His divinity with the rags of our humanity. Yes! He who dwells in light inaccessible, and rules over all things, visible and invisible, was pleased to become, not in mere outward appearance, but in very truth, "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh." He was not content, as some heretics have dared to teach. merely to make use of a human form, as a temporary instrument; to dwell within it; to speak by its lips, and to heal by its hands. No! He became actually and truly a member of the human family, and one of our own race. So truly, indeed, that from the moment of His incarnation He is as undoubtedly man as He is undoubtedly God.

What strong emotions of wonder, gratitude, and love are stirred up within our minds while we strive to grasp this mystery! What grandeur and dignity and nobility it confers upon each member of the human race! This grafting, as it were, of the Person of God into our own family, sets up an entirely new and a most wondrously close relationship between even the least of us and the Infinite and uncreated God! He is still, of course, our Creator, our Judge, our first Beginning, and our last End; the very centre and circumference of all that exists. But to us, my dear brethren, He has now begun to be *something more:* a member of our race; a companion of our exile; a fellow sufferer; an elder brother; "the Son of man acquainted with infirmity," and a sharer of all our trials, troubles, afflictions, pains, and disappointments. In a word, "like to us in all things except only sin."

Who will describe for us the thrills of rapturous delight that will reverberate through every fibre of our being when in Heaven we gaze face to face upon the

Incarnate God, and realize that He, who is the brightness of Heaven, and the glory of the saints, and the Supreme Ruler of all creatures, poising the earth on three fingers, and holding the ocean in the hollow of His hand, is also our own true and loving brother, and a member of our race!

Some there are, alas! even in these days who deny the Godhead of Christ. Yet nothing is brought out into greater prominence throughout the whole of His earthly career than the fact that He united in one Person both a human and a divine nature. This fundamental truth is clearly implied even in His very speech. When we hear Him declare: "The Father is greater than I," we think of His created nature and know that He is man. True. But when we hear Him exclaim: "I and the Father are one," we grow sensible of His consubstantiality with the Eternal Father, and we realize that He is also God. So, too, while we listen to Him moaning in His bitter agony, "My soul is sorrowful, even unto death," we know that we are listening to the cry of an overburdened human heart; on the other hand, we grow conscious of his eternal generation so soon as we hear His solemn assurance: "Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham was made, I am."

Even the very circumstances that surrounded His life serve to accentuate and to give prominence to His dual existence as God and man. That He took flesh in the womb of an earthly mother: that He was born of a poor, humble, and simple parent, and in poverty and weakness, are facts that impress us strongly with a sense of His humanity. But, on the other hand, there is a great deal in the manner of His entry into this world to lift our thoughts above what is merely human. That He should be the fruit of a spotless Immaculate Virgin, and have no man for His father, and thus show His independence of some of the most fundamental laws of nature, all serve to direct our attention to His superhuman origin.

Similar reflections may be made regarding many

other events narrated by the inspired writers. The bleak and open stable, the rough manger, and the cold straw on which the infant God was laid; as well as the trembling limbs and the weak, infantine cry of the new-born Babe, all proclaim His lowly and earthly condition. But even here God does not leave Himself without a witness. For behold! The dark midnight sky, above His humble abode, grows bright with celestial light. The angelic hosts break through the encircling heavens, and while the mountains glow with unwonted tints, choir after choir of blessed spirits ring forth their joyous notes. Yes! From myriads and myriads of angelic lips burst forth the heavenly strains: "Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to men of good will." Each hill top and mountain crest seems to echo back the sweet, silvery sounds of a music such as never before had been heard by human ears; till at last we see the shepherds creeping forth from their shelters in the clefts and gorges in the rocks and trooping down, led by their simple, ready faith, to pay homage to their infant King.

So again, although we may wonder at the apathy and indifference of the inhabitants of Bethlehem, and demand why—if this child be indeed God—they do not hasten to fall down and worship Him. Yet, here again, any gathering clouds of doubt as to His divinity are dissipated by reason of the great prodigy seen in the heavens. A miraculous star appears. And attracted by its exceptional splendor and inexplicable movements, great Kings and Potentates set out from their kingdoms in the far East, and approaching the crib, cast themselves on their faces and humbly adore the "Word made flesh." What a testimony is this to the greatness and the supremacy of the Babe just born! What a marvel to see monarchs, accustomed to all the grandeur and magnificence of the luxurious East, groping their way in the dark to a half-ruined and deserted stable! To see kings, accustomed not to kneel, but to be knelt to; not to worship, but to be worshipped, deliberately flinging themselves in the

dust at the feet of one who seems to be but a poor, helpless infant. That, surely, is more than enough to excite inquiry as to who that infant can possibly be.

Indeed, all through our Lord's life the same double character is sustained and miraculously shadowed forth. If, as a mere boy, He goes down to Nazareth and is subject to His parents, *i. e.*, to His mother and His foster father, St. Joseph; if He lives a life of obedience and obscurity, as befits the carpenter's son; He, nevertheless, allows glimpses of His divinity to be caught from time to time, as, for instance, at the age of twelve, when we find Him, wonderful to relate, disputing with the learned and hoary-headed doctors and sages in the Temple, and astoninshing and mystifying them by the wholly exceptional wisdom and sagacity of His questions and His answers.

As His life proceeds, we come across other instances. Thus, on one occasion, we find Him, like other friends, invited to assist at a marriage banquet in Cana. There He sits down and eats and drinks, and converses with His neighbors just exactly as any mere man might do: yet before the assembled guests depart, He asserts His divine omnipotence by the performance of a stupendous miracle. The wine failing, He, by a single word, converts all the water contained in six great water pots into wine, and a wine so delicious that those who knew not of the miracle, comment upon the quality, and ask, in astonishment, why the best and most luscious has been kept back till the last.

In this way we might follow our Lord's history, step by step, until we contemplate Him stretched in agony upon the infamous gibbet of the Cross; but under every circumstance He maintains His twofold character, of God and man.

What is there that so bespeaks the weakness and misery and degradation of man as death? What is less godlike? What is more essentially human? And if death, in any form, and under the most favored circumstances, suggests impotence, subjection, and in-

firmity, how much more if it be a violent death, ignominious in itself, and inflicted unjustly by the hands of wicked men!

To contemplate Christ upon the Cross: naked, helpless, and dying, with hand and feet transfixed with nails, and His life's blood streaming from a thousand wounds, is indeed to contemplate man. Yea, verily, "*the* Man of Sorrows." Or perhaps we should say, scarcely even a man, but rather "a worm, and no man." (Ps. xxi. 7.) It is, perhaps, here more than anywhere, that the *human* rather than the divine side of our Lord's character is revealed and rendered so prominent as to seem almost to obscure the divine. Yet, even in this event, His divinity is not allowed to remain long without abundant testimony. Lest men men should lose all sense of His Godhead amid such crushing humiliations, nature itself is called upon to proclaim His divinity and to publish His worth. The massive rocks split with deafening reports; the solid earth reels and rocks to and fro like a drunken man. The foundation of the world shakes to its centre. The air, even at noonday, grows pitchy dark; while the lightning, gleaming and quivering through the gloom, like the flashes of a Seraph's sword, seems to menace all with destruction. So that the most incredulous feel forced to cry out: "This is indeed the Son of God," whilst even pagans exclaim, as they tremble with alarm: This must mean either the death throes of a God, or else that the very foundations of the universe are dissolving!

When finally, we come to the closing scene of all, and reverently kneel, while we watch the lifeless body of Christ carried mournfully, tenderly by loving hands to the tomb, and there deposited as we might deposit the remains of a father or a brother, we are again inclined to think upon Christ as the *man*, the human sufferer, rather than as aught else. The human body is there. It is cold and white, and without feeling or sensibility, and is incapable of thought or movement. But while all these tokens and reminders of His hu-

man nature strike our senses, again His irresistible power is exerted, and we find ourselves once more marveling at His divine omnipotence.

Scarcely three days in the grave, and see! The ponderous stone that keeps the entrance is hurled back; the guards are thrown to the ground in terror; while He who was dead and buried bursts the chains of death; and by virtue of His own inherent power, raises Himself up, perfect, impassible, and immortal. If to die and be buried is human, to raise one's self up from death is truly divine. Verily, verily, Christ, who is born to us this glorious Christmas day, is God as well as man; and man as well as God.

To-day, my dear brethren, the Church of God commemorates in an altogether special way the union of the two natures of God and of man in the one Divine Person of the Eternal Son. Though it was not, indeed, on Christmas night, but at the moment of the Annunciation, some nine months before, that God actually took flesh and dwelt amongst us, as man, yet it was not until Christmas time that He manifested Himself to the world, and was gazed upon by human eyes. It is befitting, then, that on an occasion such as this, when the Church throughout the entire world is inviting her children to come and adore, *"Venite adoremus,"* that we should ask ourselves how we may best show forth our gratitude to God for so unspeakable a blessing.

The kings from the distant East laid their treasures at His feet. They offered Him, in particular, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. We can not do better than follow their example, and lay at the feet of our Incarnate God the same three gifts, or, rather, what these three gifts represent and symbolize, which He will value immeasurably more. Gold, which is the most precious of all metals represents charity, which is the most precious and the chief of all virtues. It is for this that God condescends to ask, when He cries: "Son, give me thy heart." To demand our "heart" is to demand our love, and our sympathy, and

our obedience. Let us not deny Him, nor turn a deaf ear.

Frankincense is a symbol of prayer and supplication, according to the expression of the prophet: "Let my prayer arise as incense in thy sight." Yes! Prayer, or the worship of the mind and the affections, is a gift of the first importance. Who shall say how much depends upon prayer? It is the master-key which unlocks the treasury of God's graces, and favors, and blessings. We may truly say that on it everything depends. If we pray well, all will go well: whereas if we are foolish enough to neglect this most pressing sacred duty, the whole of our spiritual life will suffer. Prayer is to the soul what food is to the body. Without it we grow weak and infirm, and fall an easy prey to temptation; and if we continue to neglect it, we must inevitably die spiritually, and perish everlastingly. Promise the Incarnate God, then, that you will, in future, be faithful, regular, and earnest in prayer. Let that be one of your chief Christmas offerings. And to these two, already mentioned, a third must be added, namely, the gift of myrrh. By myrrh is symbolized penance and mortification. The absence of this spirit of self-denial is at the root of all sin; since every sin is an act of self-indulgence. To practise penance is habitually to deny ourselves what our corrupt nature craves for, that is to say, what we find pleasant, enjoyable, and gratifying to our senses. By this constant self-repression, symbolized by myrrh, we not only testify our love of God, and our desire to imitate His life of suffering, but we strengthen our will, and by accustoming ourselves to resist the attractions and the seductions of even lawful and innocent pleasures, we render ourselves more and more capable of resisting such as are dangerous and forbidden.

Look into your past life. Examine the cause and motive of your falls. Whenever you fell into sin, was it not *always* because you followed your natural attractions and your unruly appetites and passions?

Was it not in every case because you had not acquired, by long practice, the habit of self-restraint and self-conquest? Mortification, represented by the gift of myrrh, should be added to the habit of prayer, represented by the gift of frankincense, and to the habit of charity, represented by the gift of gold. Laden with these three splendid gifts, let us approach with confidence our infant King, and He will bless and reward us as He alone can.

To one and all now seated before me, I wish, in His sweet name, a Happy and a Blessed Christmas, and I earnestly pray that, through His goodness and generosity, the new year, so soon to open upon us, may come to you laden with His choicest graces and blessings.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

(Feast of the Circumcision)

The Brevity of Time

Text:—"The time is short."—(*From the Epistle of the day.*)

ANOTHER term of our earthly course is done. The year 19—, like the many that have preceded it, has passed away, with its joys and its sorrows, its pleasures and its pains, its laughter and its tears. Yet it has left an indelible mark upon our souls. Not one of us is quite what he was a brief twelve months ago. We are not merely older. We are not merely a step nearer the great judgment-seat of God, but we are different.

We have passed through trials, and dangers and temptations. We have moved amid subtle and hostile forces. The world has thrown its seductions around us; the devil has laid his snares across our path, and tried to draw us into sin; and our own evil passions, like the unruly winds of ocean, have stirred up dangerous storms and tempests. We have been bruised and buffeted in the conflict. Some of us, perhaps, have been severely wounded or even spiritually slain, though now rescued and restored to life by the mercy of God's all-powerful grace. In any case we have one and all been engaged in many a hard struggle with the powers of darkness. It could scarcely be otherwise: since God has ordained that "man's life upon earth should be a warfare" (Job vii. 1), a continuous battle. Truth is ever in conflict with error; duty with inclination; vice with virtue; and nature with grace; and "A man's enemies are often those of his own household." (Matt. x. 36.)

As a traveller on his journey through an enemy's country, we look back over the path we have traversed. And as we recall to mind the places, the per-

sons, and the circumstances associated with our encounters, we mark both our failures and our successes, both our defeats and our victories. Our failures are such that we may weep over them, and ask God's pardon; our victories, in order that we may return thanks, and glorify Him who has saved us from defeat. And if our hearts be properly attuned, we cannot but be sensible of the fact, that throughout all our trials, the loving Providence of God has kept watch, and has mercifully prevented us from ever being tempted beyond our strength. That God sometimes allowed us to feel the pressure of adversity, is indeed true, for "Blessed is the man who endureth temptation." (James i. 12.) He permitted us, perhaps, even to suffer, and to suffer severely and long, for, "As silver is tried by fire, and gold in the furnace, so the Lord trieth the hearts" (Prov. xvii. 3) ; but He has never, and can never permit us to be coerced. Even when we have fallen lowest, we are bound to acknowledge that we might have stood firm, and that our discomfiture is entirely our own fault. But life is not yet over. For many of us, at least, much yet remains to be done. And as we are now entering upon another year, with its new trials and temptations, we should gather up the salutary lessons of the past for application in the future. Consider the year that has just melted away. It seems but yesterday that we were ushering it in; and now its days and hours are already spent. How quickly; how almost imperceptibly they hurried by. Yet so will it be with life itself, for is not the longest life made up of days and hours? As last year has slipped away, so will each succeeding year slip by till life itself, like some rushing current, has emptied itself in the boundless bottomless sea of eternity.

It is on such occasions as the present that we should pause to reflect, firstly, on the contrast between time and eternity; between the brief moment of our present existence and that immeasurable, endless existence which is to succeed it; and, secondly, upon the intimate relationship that exists between them.

Eternity! Eternity! Oh! word of wondrous import, who can understand it? No numeral can express it. No human mind can grasp it. No one can really explain it. We may add year to year. We may multiply century by century, but at the end of all our calculations we find ourselves no nearer to the reality than when we started. The most we can do to help our weak endeavor, is to set before our minds some stupendously protracted, though finite duration, and then to reflect that such a duration still falls short, yes, immeasurably short of eternity itself. Such methods, because best befitting our limited capacity, are not without their use. Let us then seek to gain some faint idea of the length of the future that awaits us, by an exercise of our imagination. We will make two suppositions. In the first place we will suppose all known space, from the center of the earth to the most distant fixed star, to be closely packed with minute grains of fine sand; and in the second place, we will suppose that at the close of every thousand years a single grain is destroyed. Try and conceive the number of centuries that must elapse before even the smallest indenture would be hollowed out! Try to conceive the periods that would have to roll by, before a space could be cleared between the earth, and its nearest satellite, the moon. Push on your calculations till head and brain reel under the effort. No one can really make the calculation; yet the total number of grains is essentially limited, since known space is itself limited. Consequently, the moment, however inconceivably distant, would at last arrive, when the very last remaining grain would be destroyed. Nevertheless, eternity would not have been exhausted. It could hardly be said to have begun. Having reached the last grain, let us now, in imagination, replace every particle as before, and this time give to *each,* the time-value that in the first instance we gave to their entire sum; and then proceed as before. In this way we may indeed puzzle and bewilder ourselves with the immensity of the period before us, but eternity

remains as remote and as completely beyond our reach as ever. However stupendous and immense the duration we can conjure up, or suggest by figures or diagrams, we cannot break through the barriers of Time, nor shake ourselves free from its narrow limitations. Yet even were it not eternity, but merely some such gigantic period of existence that awaited us after life, even then, I say, the quality and character of that existence, if determined by our present earthly career, should occupy all our thoughts and care.

But having flashed a hasty glance down the endless avenues of eternity, let us now turn our thoughts upon the present order of things, and consider the fleeting moment of our earthly state. "*Tempus breve est*" (1 Cor. vii.) exclaims the Apostle. "Time is short." Yes, all time, whatever its duration, is short when eternity is considered. The most protracted earthly life is but a span. We are here to-day. To-morrow we are gone. "Man cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed and fleeth as a shadow, and never continueth in the same state." (Job xiv.) What, after all, are a paltry fifty, or eighty, or even a hundred years? When looked forward to, they may seem to be an appreciable quantity. When looked back upon, they seem no more than a phantom of the night. By a small child, just entering upon the stage of this world, fifty years is regarded as an immense period. A period that stretches away to endless distances. When he has reached mature years, however, it wears quite another aspect. It has already shrunk away into comparative insignificance. But let us, in spirit, follow the self-same individual after he has stepped across the confines of this world. Let us consider him in his life beyond the tomb. Let us grant that he has lived—whether in Heaven or in hell matters not—say, a hundred million centuries, or more. Bid him, from such coign of vantage, look back across that stupendous interval of time, and fix his gaze upon his earthly life of eighty or ninety years. Ask him what

he thinks of it now. Ask him what value he sets upon it. To us, it is long: very long and tedious. But to him over whose head a hundred million centuries have rolled, it can appear but as a moment, but as the lightning's flash; a mere nothing at all! Accustomed to deal with millions of centuries he can scarcely bring himself to understand how so brief an interval as that which his earthly life embraced, can ever have been of any importance, or how it can ever have been of the slightest interest to anyone. It forms such an infinitesimal fraction of the period that has elapsed since he left the earth. But if eighty years is little and contemptible when contrasted with a hundred million centuries; a hundred million centuries is yet more insignificant and contemptible when contrasted with eternity; or rather no comparison is really so much as possible. If a hundred million centuries then be as nothing when compared with eternity, what is a paltry earthly life of eighty or ninety years compared with eternity? No human mind can appreciate its insignificance.

No wonder that this thought when once appreciated and mastered, has driven men and women by hundreds and thousands into the desert. No wonder that it has filled monasteries and convents with monks and nuns. To master it, is to gain possession of a most powerful motive for leading a life of the closest union with God. But, dear brethren, such a thought has lost nothing of its own intrinsic value. It is as cogent and irresistible to-day as at any period of the world's history. But it is not a thought that men love to harbor. They prefer to banish such considerations from their minds. And why? Because such considerations breed compunction, and lead to sorrow for sin, and to resolutions of amendment, and most men are more anxious about temporal than about eternal things; and would live on forever in this sad, sinful world, were the chance but afforded them. "Most men," writes Pope Leo XIII., "with little heed as to whence they have come, or to whither they are going,

place all their thoughts and all their care upon the vain and fleeting goods of this life; and contrary to nature and to right order, they voluntarily give themselves up to serve things, of which their reason tells them they should be masters." [Encyclical Letter. Dec. 30, 1888.]

Let us, at least strive to view the situation with more wisdom and prudence; and weigh well and seriously, the true meaning and responsibility of life. There are two points of view from which our earthly career may be contemplated. We may consider it, firstly, in itself; and secondly, we may consider it in its consequences. Considered in itself, there is scarcely anything so trivial, so empty, so worthless or so unsatisfying. If this life were all and if everything ended with the dissolution of the body, what wise man would trouble himself about it! If the present bore no relation to the future, a sensible person would look down upon it with the greatest contempt and disdain. If indeed this material earth were the only theatre of man's activity; if his only reward were the applause and approval of posterity, where should we find motives weighty enough for leading a virtuous life? Take any great city, such as London, Paris, New York, or Boston. Where are now the multitudes that formed their teeming populations but one short century ago? An individual here and there, a great politician, a famous writer, a scientist or a philosopher may, perhaps, still survive the effects of "time's effacing fingers." Their names, and just a fact or two concerning them, may linger yet in the memory of the living. But soon even their very names will be forgotten, and oblivion will claim them as her own. Of the unnumbered millions of ordinary laborers, servants, artisans, professional men, and others, is there so much as one that we know anything about? Is there a single individual among the masses of the people of that far-off period, whose name we could mention, whose life we could describe, or whose career is of the slightest interest to anyone amongst us? No! So far as the present gen-

eration is concerned they are as though they never had been. So will it be with us. We may be of some importance now. We may exercise some slight influence over our immediate friends and acquaintances; and affect in some degree our own generation, but our names shall scarcely reach down to another.

Fame, riches, titles, honors, decorations, high positions! What are all such things but the playthings of children! They may serve to beguile, to amuse, to interest us for awhile: but they possess no intrinsic worth. They are wholly incapable of conferring any true value on life; they cannot even perpetuate one's memory among the living. No! Life is a vain boast; an empty show; a meaningless and saddening comedy, if its influence stretch not beyond this temporal order of things and if it be regarded in itself alone.

But, there is just one grand and fundamental fact which rescues life from all triviality and meanness; and which invests it with a value and an importance impossible to exaggerate, impossible even fully and adequately to express. And what is that? It is that in this short and seemingly empty life on earth, is contained the pledge of an endless eternity. The present moment is big with promise. It is the seed, eternity is the fruit. In this moment of time, eternal issues are being fought out. Heaven and hell tremble in the balance. Yes! O! Awful thought! It is my present life that will necessarily and inevitably determine where my dwelling-place is to be, so long as God is God. There is no fact so certain. There is no fact so awful. There is no fact that so deserves my most serious consideration. Yes. Face it I must.

"On me," each one must exlaim, "yes, on me, and on me alone depends my future; and such a future!" A future that cannot be computed by years, nor expressed in human language, nor conceived by living man! A future which embraces all conceivable time, and which nothing can diminish or increase. As the day follows the night, so does eternity follow time. It is before me; it is approaching me nearer and nearer

day by day, and I can neither avoid it nor ward it off. My only power over it is that of determining its nature and condition. That is to say, it does indeed rest with me to make it an eternity of honor or of dishonor, of joy or of sorrow; of pleasure or of pain. My life, my conduct, my fidelity or infidelity to God's law will decide whether I am to spend eternity in a veritable delirium of delight, or in everlasting paroxysm of misery and despair.

Can I realize this? Can I measure my responsibility? Can I grasp the terrors of the situation? Is it possible to be really sensible of the burden that is laid upon me and not feel wholly overwhelmed? Can any man look eternity full in the face and not stagger and tremble and hold his breath, at the bare thought of the consequences that might ensue even from one false step; from one moment's weakness and indecision, culminating in some real and deliberate breach of God's law?

Most men dismiss these thoughts too lightly; they scarcely fear because they scarcely understand; and they fail to understand because they refuse to reflect. "*Remember thy last end,*" is the command of the Holy Spirit of God. And with this command is bound up a comforting and encouraging promise: "*and thou shalt never sin.*" (Ecclus. vii. 40.) On the other hand the want of serious thought is the secret of all our misery and of all our woe. "With desolation is the whole world made desolate, because there is none who considereth in his heart." (Jer. xii. 11.)

At the opening of the new year it is especially encumbent upon us to enter into ourselves, and to examine our past career in the presence of God, and in the light of the Judgment-seat, with a view of amendment and self-correction. "*Tempus breve est.*" "The time is short." Let us make a better use of the moments that remain; and enter upon the service of God with increased zeal and earnestness, and brace ourselves up, as though this present year were to be the very last of our earthly course.

FEAST OF OUR LADY'S ASSUMPTION

Text:—"Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?"—(*Canticle of Canticles viii,* 5.)

ALTHOUGH the ever blessed Virgin Mary was the child of St. Joachim and of St. Anne, born, in fact, of earthly parents, like the rest of us, yet in a number of respects she is wholly singular and exceptional. In the first place she was conceived immaculate, and born into this world without the slightest stain of original sin. In the second place, she lived her life of sixty years or so, without ever committing the slightest moral fault, or falling into the least imperfection; in the third place, she was selected to be the Mother of the Eternal Son of God, who drew His Blood from her veins, and became man in her womb. Further, although truly a Mother, she never ceased to be a Virgin. The prophet Isaias, vii. 14, announced long before that "a Virgin shall conceive and bring forth a Son, and that His name should be called Emmanuel," and in the Apostle's Creed, which we repeat so often, Mary "the Virgin" is associated, not with man, but with the Holy Ghost, as the source and origin of her fruitfulness, in bringing forth Jesus Christ. Indeed, to all the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers, Mary has always been, *par excellence,* "the Virgin." The reason of this singular privilege is, by universal consent, given in the inspired words of Ezechiel xliv. 2: "This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it; *because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it,* and it shall be shut."

Now, just as Mary was an exception to the rest of the human race (a) in the immaculateness of her conception, (b) in the absolute purity of her life, (c) and

in the unbroken virginity of her motherhood, so was she an exception also in her death and assumption.

Most undoubtedly she passed through the gates of death unto life eternal. This is the universal belief of the Church. Not that she merited death, since the law of death as revealed in the inspired pages, is the punishment of those only who have been guilty of sin, and as Mary was exempt from original sin, as well as from all actual sin, therefore was she also exempt from its penalty. Nor can it be urged that death must ensue in consequence of her human nature, for, in her case, the claim of nature is superseded by a supernatural claim to immortality; which would have been true even of Adam and Eve, had they not sinned, and therefore, much more so in the case of Mary. On the other hand, Mary is the mother of Him, who died for us, so that it was becoming and fitting that she should die also, and for two reasons, firstly, lest she and her Son's natures should be thought unreal, and secondly, lest the human Mother should be privileged above her Divine son. Thus, Mary died because Jesus died: not from violence nor from disease, for we must bear in mind that her death was neither an expiation nor a penalty, but—if we are to trust tradition—from the immensity of her love and her consuming desire to "be dissolved and to be with Christ." Her passing away may truly be described as a sacrifice on love's altar, completing and crowning the heroic sacrifice of her entire life. It was a sweet and glorious translation from earth to Heaven, *in osculo Domini*, in the kiss of the Lord.*

But though Mary truly died, it is the belief of the universal Church that her spotless body never saw corruption. This "Assumption" of Our Blessed Lady, body and soul, into Heaven is not, indeed, like her Immaculate Conception and Divine Maternity, a defined article of faith, but is theologically certain, and it would be rash to question it. Indeed, the belief has

* Vide: A Manual of Theology, by Wilhelm & Scannel. Vol. ii, 215 et seq.

on theological principles so solid a foundation, that many theologians think it already ripe for dogmatic definition. Time will show.

It would be revolting to our sense of the fitness of things to suppose that the body of God's own Mother, and the Immaculate Spouse of the Holy Ghost, should be allowed to fall into corruption and become the food of worms. On the contrary, to her who conceived without knowing man, who brought forth without lesion, and whose flesh, without concupiscence had encompassed Divinity, we may rather apply the words of the Psalmist: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; nor wilt Thou give Thy holy one to see corruption." (Ps. xv. 10.)

According to the most generally received tradition, the Mother of Jesus died some twelve or fifteen years after the Crucifixion, and her body was interred with every sign of respect by the Apostles and Disciples of Our Lord, who were dwelling in the neighborhood. On the third day they returned to revisit her tomb, but instead of her body, nothing but the garments were to be found, while the spot on which she had been laid exhaled a most sweet and delicious odor. From this public fact the early Christians very naturally concluded that Our Lord had called His Blessed Mother to Heaven, both body and soul.

There are many reasons which seem to add force and conviction to this belief. The first is that even others, with far less claim, seem to have received a similar privilege. St. Matthew informs us that on Our Saviour's death upon the Cross, "the graves were opened, and many bodies of the Saints that slept arose; and issuing from the tombs, after the Resurrection, came into the Holy City, and appeared unto many." Thus, there is no doubt but that, on rising from the tomb, Christ, who was "the first fruit of the death," caused many of the dead also to arise in their bodies. And it is the teaching of such sound authorities as St. Ignatius, martyr, Origen, Eusebius, Epiphanius and others, that these did not return to cor-

ruption and the grave, but were assumed up to Heaven in their bodies, with Our Blessed Lord, at the time of His Ascension.* Now, if this opinion be admitted, who will have the hardihood to deny a similar privilege to the great Mother of God and Queen of the heavenly host? To say that such a favor was conferred upon ordinary saints, and those, too, belonging to the old dispensation, and that it was withheld from the highest and holiest of all creatures, would be an outrage upon reason and common sense.

Besides, in corroboration of the fact, we have the unanimous consent on the subject of the Greek and Latin and Oriental Churches, the general consent of Martyrologies and Liturgies, the common conviction of Christians, and further, the difficulties of accounting for and of explaining this wondrous agreement, on any other hypothesis but that the marvelous event really took place. These constitute, when taken together, a mass of evidence which no reasonable person can well resist.

Further, there is another positive fact, which it is impossible to explain, except upon the understanding that the Blessed Virgin's body was taken up into Heaven, viz., that such a thing as a personal relic of her does not exist. Such a thing is unknown and unheard of in the Church. We have personal relics of thousands of lesser saints. We venerate the bodies of the great Apostles Saints Peter and Paul at Rome; we can go to visit the remains of St. Andrew at Amalfi; we find the precious bones of Virgins, Martyrs, Confessors and Saints of all kinds, carefully preserved in silver and golden reliquaries and costly shrines and treasured up as most sacred objects of veneration all over the world. But of the greatest of all the Saints, of the Mother of God herself, there is no *personal* relic existing. Of the Apostles and disciples we have a faithful record kept. We can kneel down and pray at their tombs, we can point to the

* Vide: Benedict XIV., De Testis, p. 502.

very shrine which encloses their human remains, awaiting their glorious resurrection. And if Our Lady's body, far more sacred than any other, yea, the very body in which God took flesh and became man, had remained on earth there is no doubt but that a record would have been kept, and every Christian throughout the world would know the hallowed spot where the relics reposed. Her tomb would attract pilgrims from every country and from every clime, and a great Basilica would have risen above it more splendid and more magnificent even than that which now rises above the burial place of Saints Peter and Paul close to the renowned Palace of the Popes in Rome.

Why are her remains left unhonored? Why does no sumptuous monument mark the spot where she was laid to rest? Why do pilgrims and pious Christians not flock around her tomb? Why is nothing ever said concerning the immaculate and spotless body of the Virgin Mother of the Most High God? Why? The answer is plain. Because her body rests, not upon earth, nor in any material shrine however grand and costly. Because it was assumed into Heaven, and reunited to her sinless soul, and, like the Body of Jesus, was raised to a position of honor in the celestial courts, there to rejoice the assembled multitudes of angels and men. Oh! There can be but one explication of the attitude of Catholics toward the body of the Blessed Virgin. They do not seek it, nor inaugurate pilgrimages to the spot where it was laid to rest, because they know that it is no longer on earth, but in Heaven, not in the darkness of the grave, but in the region of perpetual light and glory above. Like St. Gregory of Tours, writing as far back as the sixth century, they declare their belief to be that "The Lord ordered the most sacred body of the Virgin to be taken up to Paradise, where now, united with her soul, it is exulting with the elect, and enjoying for ever, without any fear of change, the good things of eternity."

And we, dear brethren, as her children and devoted admirers, rejoice this day at her unparalleled happiness and exalted privileges. We cast our eyes up to Heaven, and there in spirit we behold her in all her majesty and peerless beauty, standing before the dazzling splendor of God's imperial throne, the true Mother of the King of Kings, yet our gentle Mother also.

Though so great and so glorious and so unspeakably happy, yet she, like ourselves, once trod earth's hard ways, and moved amid the trials and tribulations and hardships of this sin-stained world. And we, on our side, if only we are faithful, may come one day to share her present peace and happiness in the eternal mansions above.

Our Lady is put before us by the Church, not only that we may contemplate her exceptional prerogatives, not only that we may render her homage and return her thanks for the innumerable favors and services she has rendered us, but also that we may be stirred by her heroic example and encouraged by her rewards, to live for God alone, and to walk in her footsteps.

If we are true Christians, that is to say, true followers of Christ, we shall ardently desire to honor and please His most Blessed Mother. But how shall we best succeed in pleasing her? Not, my brethren, by uttering sweet sounds and empty praises, but rather by putting her before us as our most perfect example and by striving to the best of our power to model our life upon hers.

God loved her. Truly, He loved her more than He loved the angels and the saints. He loved her beyond all and before all. And why? Was it wholly or even chiefly because of her relation to Him? Because, in a word, she was His mother? No, my brethren, there was a reason yet more cogent and more forcible than that. He loved her above all by reason of her unrivalled goodness, and on account of the intensity of her love, which led her to listen most carefully to

every inspiration and to every indication of His will, and which induced her to keep His commandments and to obey Him perfectly, and at all times and in all things.

When a woman in the crowd, which, on one occasion, followed Our Lord, during His public ministering called out in the excess of her admiration: "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the breasts that gave Thee suck," he replied, in never-to-be-forgotten words, "Yea, rather blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." (Luke xi. 28.)

He did not deny the honor and the privilege enjoyed by Mary, in being chosen to be His Blessed Mother, but He laid down the principle that the true greatness and true sanctity depend not upon human ties or physical relationships, but upon complete obedience and conformity to the Divine Will. "Blessed rather are they who hear the word of God and keep it."

We cannot share Mary's privilege in being Christ's mother, although as children of Mary we become, in a sense, the brethren of Jesus; but we can, by studiously avoiding all sin, become so dear to Him as to merit the title and the position both of parents and of brethren. You remember in St. Matthew's Gospel, how we read that "As Jesus was yet speaking to the multitude, behold His Mother and His brethren stood without, seeking to speak to Him. And one said unto Him, Behold Thy Mother and Thy brethren stand without, seeking Thee. But he answering him, said: Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? And stretching forth His hand towards His disciples, He said: Behold my mother and my brethren. For, *whosoever shall do the will of my Father, that is in Heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.*" (Matt. xii. 46-50.)

Here Our Lord clearly lays down the principle that all true, lasting and close union with Him depends upon complete conformity with His divine will. As His most blessed will is infinite in perfection, and mirrors forth His own uncreated and unfathomable sanctity,

so the more closely our human and created will acts in conformity with His, the more perfect it becomes, and the nearer grows our relationship with Him. The doing the will of the heavenly Father is the primary condition of salvation. No man can be saved who seriously fails in this. But there are infinite degrees in the perfection with which we accomplish His will, from the bare avoidance of deadly sins to the most careful and rigid observance of the highest counsels of perfection. If Mary is the first and greatest of God's creatures, if she stands forth peerless and without a rival amid the unnumbered hosts of saints and angels, it is because her will was ever more strongly attached to and more absolutely one with the will of God than was the will of any other.

In doing God's will lies the whole secret of sanctity. This is the road and the only road that leads to God and to everlasting bliss. "If you will enter into life, keep the Commandments," for the Commandments are but the external expression of the will of the Supreme Lawgiver. And the more perfectly we keep these Commands, not merely in their broad outlines, but in every minute particular, the more we advance in virtue and the greater the proof we give of our love.

A day will come, my dear brethren, and it may not be so far distant, when you who are now seated before me will be called upon to lay down the earthly task God has given you to do, and to appear before Him in judgment. In a few years at most, you will pass away from your family and home, and from all you love and cherish most dearly, into that mysterious region where the Divine Pastor of our souls divide the sheep from the goats, and assigns to each his respective reward or punishment.

What will be your feelings as you realize that you are at the very end of your life, and that you have but a few more hours to breathe? What thoughts will fill your mind as the solemn truth at last forces itself upon you that Death is knocking at your gates: when, in spite of those who would keep the truth from

you, and who would buoy you up with false hopes, you are convinced that the world is vanishing from your sight, that your body is growing cold and insensible, and that your senses are failing and refusing their service? What, I ask, will be your feelings then? If we have imitated Our Lady's innocence and purity during life, we shall no doubt share her joy and exultation at the thought of being speedily united with Him who is our Father, our Benefactor and our truest Friend. But, if we have seldom thought of God, and have taken but little trouble to please Him and to carry out His divine will, there is no thought that can then bring us much comfort or consolation.

Place the glorious image of the Blessed Virgin before the eyes of your soul. Contemplate her, after her life of self-denial and fervent love, ascending up into Heaven, amid the joyous acclamations of angels and the ringing praises of saints. See her there amid the heavenly choirs, crowned with imperishable glory by the hands of God Himself. And as you gaze, remember that it is her perfect conformity to God's will, while upon earth, that has won her so much bliss. For though "blessed indeed was the womb that brought forth God Incarnate, and the breast that gave Him suck," yet more blessed still was the pure and holy soul that not only "heard the words of God" but that also "kept them"; yes, kept them faithfully and perfectly and perseveringly and with great joy, and love, in spite of difficulties and obstacles and trials and sorrows without number.

And if, on this glorious day of the Assumption, we wish to associate ourselves with Our Blessed Lady's triumphs and success, let us resolve, like her, to "hear the words of God and to keep them," with filial devotion and childlike submission. Those divine words come to us continually and in various ways. They come to us through the teaching Church, through our own conscience, through the direct inspirations and whisperings of the Holy Ghost, through our lawful superiors, our instructors, and our confessors and di-

rectors. God is always communicating to us His holy will, always inviting and urging us to a better, higher and more spiritual life, and it remains for us to open our ears to His voice, and to bend our stubborn wills to obey it promptly and in all things. In this manner we shall run in the way of His Commandments and attain the end of our creation, and share, in some measure, at least, in the joys and delight that now fill to overflowing the pure and glorious soul of Our Immaculate Mother.

FEAST OF THE ASCENSION

The Commission to the Apostles

Text:—"Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. . . . And these signs shall follow them that believe. In my name, they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay their hands upon the sick, and they shall recover."—(*From the Gospel of the day.*)

THOUGH the four Evangelists, inspired by the Holy Ghost, have left us a written account of the chief event in Our Lord's life, yet they have been at no pains to keep strictly either to the order in which these events occurred, or to the special circumstances attending them. One writer is found to mention an incident omitted by another; while sometimes two or more will narrate the same actions or words, but present them in a different order. The narrative is always substantially the same, but the manner and the phraseology may differ in each case. There are always the *same facts,* but they are often *differently expressed.* In short, there are no *contradictions* between one Evangelist and another, but there are *differences.* And divine Providence has, no doubt, brought this about deliberately in order to strengthen our faith. For, even apart from all supernatural revelation, the complete harmony and accord between the four Evangelists may be accepted as a guarantee of their sincerity and truthfulness; while the many differences between them prove that this harmony is not the result of concerted action or of a deliberate plan. Since they wrote at different times, and in places far removed from one another, it is quite evident that each must have recorded the simple truth, for otherwise such harmony as does exist, could never have been maintained.

We have several instances of these differences in to-day's Gospel, if we compare it with that of St. Matthew, but I will confine myself to one. St. Mark tells

us that Jesus appeared to the eleven apostles *"as they were at table,"* and upbraided them for their incredulity, etc. "And that then He said to them: Go ye into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

St. Matthew, on the other hand, not only gives the words a different setting, but he also adds some important amplifications which St. Mark does not record at all. Thus, St. Matthew says nothing about Our Lord appearing to the disciples *"as they were at table,"* but he gives us the words of Jesus about going and teaching all nations, just as St. Luke does; only he gives them more fully. According to St. Matthew, Jesus Christ "spoke to them saying: all power is given to Me in Heaven and in earth; going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptising them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world."

The task of Our Lord laid upon His apostles, in the above command, was indeed a gigantic one, and humanly speaking, hopelessly impossible and beyond their strength. Consider for a moment. Before the eyes of the faithful few, lay the great far-stretching pagan world, with all its vices and concupiscences. Great nations, and people, wholly given up to pleasure and amusement, and the full gratification of every passion, were to be tamed and conquered and drawn into obedience to the Church of Christ. The powerful and the stubborn, the proud and the vainglorious were to humble themselves under the sweet yoke of the divine Teacher. The most learned and the most cultured and accomplished scholars and philosophers of Rome and Greece were to bow the head and submit their judgments and renounce their pet theories at the challenge of the followers of "a crucified criminal"! Men and women, accustomed to every luxury and wordly delight, and who had never denied themselves in anything, were now to renounce their own

wills, to tread the narrow way of the commandments, and to take up their cross daily and follow their crucified Lord.

Such was the change to be brought about! And how was this tremendous transformation to be accomplished? What were the means? What were the instruments? Since it was God's work, and since He was resolved that every honest inquirer should clearly see that it could be the work of no other, He deliberately and purposely chose what (humanly speaking) were the most inadequate and impossible instruments. As St. Paul reminds us: "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, that He might confound the wise; and the weak things of the world, that He might confound the strong; and the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible hath God chosen, and the things that are not, that He might bring to naught the things that are; so that no flesh should glory in His sight." (1 Cor. i. 27-29.)

Considered in themselves, what means could be more hopelessly inadequate than the preaching of twelve poor laboring men? Men, be it observed, without wealth, or resources, or position, or education, or refinement or culture, or anything else, in the natural order to recommend them. Yet God chose them to carry the glad tidings of His Gospel throughout the world and to draw the nations into His fold. Truly did He select the weak and the foolish and the base and the contemptible things of the world, to work the marvelous changes He had in view. And how did He propose to render this great undertaking successful?

In the first place, He infused real and enduring courage into the Apostles. They had been weak, and vacillating and irresolute. They had hidden themselves, for fear of the Jews, and dreaded the opposition of the world. But so soon as Jesus had sent the Holy Spirit down upon them, all their timidity vanished. They were transformed. They became other beings, and boldly exposed themselves without hesitation to imprisonment, scourging and even to death.

For their undertaking courage was, of course, essential. For had not Christ warned them, saying: "They will deliver you up in councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues. And you shall be brought before governors and before kings, for My sake." (Matt. x. 17.) Had He not already told them, that they were going among men, "as sheep among wolves," to be torn and lacerated and devoured?

But however necessary courage might be, it alone was not enough. Two other things were also requisite. In the *first* place, they must be able to deliver Christ's actual message, and to offer to all a clear and intelligent exposition of Christ's doctrine; and in the *second* place, they must be provided with some means of convincing their hearers of the truth of the message they came to deliver.

Both these needs were fully and abundantly provided, by the munificence of our Divine Lord. As regards the first, there was the distinct promise that they would be divinely assisted, so that there would be no risk of their forgetting or mistaking or misinterpreting the doctrine they had learned from the lips of their divine Master. Our Lord especially charges them to "take no thought how or what to speak, for *it shall be given you* in that hour what you have to say. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you." (Matt. x. 19, 20.)

So again, He declares that "the Spirit of truth will teach you all truth." (John xvi. 13.) And yet more explicity still in the fourteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel, where we read: "The Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things, *and bring all things to your mind*, whatsoever I shall have said to you."

From these and other quotations, too numerous to mention, we see how God provided for and secured the true and accurate and full enunciation of His teaching by the infallible lips of His Apostles; and how He rendered it impossible for them either to mistake or even to forget the true import of His divine words.

But there was still something wanting. It is one thing to annunciate a truth, but it is quite another thing to secure its acceptance. To state is not to convince. In fact, men will generally turn a deaf ear to any doctrine which clashes with their worldly interests, or which opposes their natural inclinations, or which demands of them real sacrifice and self-denial. In such cases, something more than the mere declaration of a truth is necessary. The declaration must be accompanied by unmistakable proofs of the authority of the speaker, and of his right to command assent.

If the Apostles were to convert the world, and to induce men to curb their passions and to submit their proud intellects to the obedience of faith, they must bear about them credentials from above, and be able to present before the eyes of their hearers a divine sanction. But even this, too, they were able to offer, since Jesus Christ conferred upon them the power of working miracles. "In my name," our Blessed Lord declared, "they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them. They shall lay their hands upon the sick, and they shall recover." And this most glorious promise was fulfilled to the letter, as St. Mark bears witness, for he says: "And after Jesus had spoken to them, He was taken up into Heaven . . . but they, going forth, preached everywhere, the Lord working withal, and *confirming the word with signs* (*i. e.*, miracles) which followed."

There is nothing so convincing or that so appeals to men as genuine miracles. A miracle is an argument that *all* can understand. It is a sign that is addressed with equal force to the learned and to the ignorant; to the educated and to the simple and illiterate. Moreover, it arrests attention, and compels men to pause and to think and to demand an explanation. It was in this way that Christianity caught hold of the people, and spread so far and so rapidly all over the

world, in spite of the most determined opposition and the most cruel and continual persecutions!

Thus, to take an instance or two, men might indeed have hesitated to accept the teaching of the Apostles so long as they spoke merely as other men had spoken, but when, to their utter amazement, they found that every man, no matter what his nationality might be, heard them speak in his own tongue, it entirely altered the situation. The vast crowd were all agog, we are told, and cried out: "Behold, are not all these, who speak, Galileans? Then how is it that we have heard *every man our own tongue,* wherein we were born, Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Lybia about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome. Jews, also, and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians: we have heard them (the Apostles) speak in our own tongue the wonderful works of God." (Acts ii. 5, 11.) Naturally "they were astonished and wondered; saying to one another, what meaneth this?" (Acts ii. 12.) Nor is it strange that after such an experience they were easily persuaded to embrace the truth.

Or take another illustration, from the third chapter of the Acts. We might perhaps doubt the influence of the simple fishermen, Saints Peter and John, upon the masses of the Jews as they went down to the Temple in Jerusalem, were they left unassisted by God. We might imagine that no one would pay them much attention, or show them much respect; but, as soon as we learn that they began to display miraculous powers, the whole condition of affairs undergoes a change. A certain beggar, lame from his birth, was carried every day to the entrance of the Temple, that he might solicit alms. He was well known to all who frequented the place, and many had dropped coins into his extended palms. Imagine, then, the effect on the Jews who stood around, as they beheld the following incident, narrated by St. Luke: "The beggar looked earnestly upon Saints Peter and John, hoping that

he should receive something of them. But Peter said: 'Silver and gold I have none, but what I have, I give thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk.'" Like the blast of some loud clarion, these bold words must have rung with startling effect throughout the Temple. And men who heard them must have turned to see if a mere presumptuous boaster had come among them, or if the prodigy suggested would really be effected. They had not long to wait, for Peter "took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and forthwith his feet and soles received strength. And leaping up he stood and walked, and *went with them into the Temple, walking and leaping* and praising God. And all the people saw him." And then the Evangelist goes on to say that "they knew him to be the beggar who was accustomed to sit, begging alms, at the beautiful gate of the Temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened to him." (Acts iii. 1 to 11.) After such a striking and irresistible proof of his authority and power, St. Peter's words fell on the ears of the astonished multitude with astounding effect. The miracle he had just wrought, and "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth," too, gave him a right to speak and to be respectfully heard: and many among his audience were convinced and were baptized.

Thus, the twelve wandered forth from city to city, and from country to country, not merely preaching and teaching and exhorting and threatening, but enforcing their doctrine, and compelling unwilling ears to attend, by the wonders and supernatural marvels that everywhere accompanied their fervent words.

Thus, the world was gradually won over by the Apostles and their successors to the true faith, as taught by Jesus Christ. The difficult had been effected, and the impossible had been actually done. The weak things, in the hands of God, had confounded the strong; and the foolish things had confounded the wise; and in an incredibly short time the proudest of

nations, the great Roman Empire, had yielded to the crucified Galilean.

Now, outside of the pale of the true Church, my dear brethren, there are many who smile skeptically when we Catholics speak of miracles; for they deny that such things are so much as possible.

But the broad facts of history render miracles absolutely necessary. There are difficulties that can be explained in no other way; and locks which can be opened by no other key.

The conversion of the world from paganism to Christianity is not a dream or a fancy. It is a stern reality: an undeniable fact. And how we are to explain it, if we deny the very existence of miracles? —which can alone account for it.

To suppose that a mere handful of rude, uncultured fishermen, without worldly resources, without culture, position, learning or eloquence could, without divine assistance, successfully oppose and beat back and conquer the great powers of the world, who hated and loathed the very name of Christian, and who set themselves to persecute and destroy Christianity by every means in their power, is absolute folly and madness. Again and again, especially during the first three long centuries of her history, we have seen the world raging in anger at the infant Church. Wave after wave of persecution beat against the fragile barque of Peter, each more violent and more pitiless than the preceding. But all in vain, for around the barque are the divine Arms, to bear her up, and to safeguard and protect her. For, Christ did not promise that the winds and the storms of persecution should not beat about her, and assail her in every possible way. No! All He promised was that they should never prevail. "The gates of hell shall not *prevail* against her." "Fear not, for I have overcome the world," and "Behold I (who have overcome the world) am with you all days, even unto the end of time," and will enable you too to overcome it.

Thus, to-day, after well-nigh two thousand years,

we are able to bear witness to the fulfilment of those words which Christ uttered, as He stood lovingly before His disciples, ere He bade them farewell and ascended triumphantly up into Heaven, where He has gone to prepare a place for us, who venerate and glorify His name.

In some respects we are better off than even His Apostles were. They indeed heard Him prophesy. They could listen while He foretold both their trials and their triumphs, and while He predicted the wonderful expansion of His Church, until from a minute assembly it became a world-wide body. But, we, who are living to-day, can do more. We can look back and see His promises actually verified. We can read the truth, the absolute truth, of His words in the history of the past twenty centuries, and recognize in Him a divine Person, with whom the future is as the present, and who can not only predict the most distant events, but who can mold and fashion and control the course of history, and secure His own ends without coercing or in any way interfering with the free will of His rational creatures.

From His high throne above, where He sits on the right hand of the Father, He looks down upon us, as upon those whom He has redeemed with His most precious Blood. While, then, we rejoice on this Ascension Day, at the supreme happiness and glory that are His, let us encourage ourselves by the thought that if only we persevere in His friendship, we too shall one day rise from the tomb glorious and immortal, to share in the joy and peace of His own wonderful life. Though weak and helpless of ourselves, He, who gave the thousands of martyrs courage to despise torment and death for His sake, will extend to us likewise a helping hand, and bring us, by His grace, to His Heavenly Kingdom. That we may all be one day united together before His "great white Throne," in secure possession of eternal life and happiness, is the greatest blessing I can wish you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

FEAST OF ALL SAINTS

The Force of Example in the Spiritual Life

Text:—"God is wonderful in His saints."—(*Ps. lxvii.* 36.)

THE doctrine taught by Jesus Christ is found to be difficult and exceedingly distasteful to the natural man. Now, the Church well knows that it is far easier for her children to learn it by example than by the solemn enunciation of dry precept. The abstract truth one may indeed admire, but it makes little appeal to the sluggish will. We approve and applaud, and then pass on our way, and soon forget the impression it has made. But, when the same truth is presented to us in the concrete, it arrests our attention, and fills us with holy desires. So that when we witness the conduct of holy men, we are inclined to exclaim, with the great St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, "Why should not I do as these have done?" When we look upon men and women of the world, practising heroic virtue, and leading noble and self-denying lives, we soon begin to realize that Sanctity is not an exotic of another clime, but a plant of earthly growth, and that, so far from being unattainable, it may be secured by anyone who is thoroughly determined to do his best to make it his own.

Hence, it is that the Church, in her wisdom, and with her intimate knowledge of human nature, is careful to put before us, day by day, all the year through, some one or another of her great canonized saints. One day, perhaps, it is a mighty warrior or a sturdy soldier, like St. Sebastian, who contrived to lead a life of heroic sanctity amid the clash of arms and the din and smoke of battle. And who felt as conscious of the presence of God, and as near to him, while resting in His tent, or shouldering His arms, as if He were kneeling before the tabernacle or assisting at Mass.

Another day, she will summon before us the venerable figure of some holy Pope, like St. Gregory, or St. Pius V., who rose to a condition of the most exalted virtue in the midst of his innumerable duties, cares and responsibilities, and his solicitude for all the churches. The following day, perhaps, we celebrate the feast of some obscure virgin or cloistered nun, such as St. Teresa, or St. Clare who, urged by a supernatural impulse, turned their backs altogether on the world and on all its empty vanities, that they might dedicate the whole of their time and thought and affection to Him, whom they had learned to love exclusively and above all. Like some beautiful flower, in an enclosed garden, they grew in grace and loveliness, fostered and nourished by Him alone, who "feeds among the lilies," and "whose delight it is to be with the children of men."

Sometimes the Church may invite us to contemplate a more homely scene, and will disclose for our wonder and admiration, the inner life of some rich married lady, like St. Monica, or St. Elizabeth, whose burning love of God was shown in her assiduous attention to the most ordinary duties of her state, and in the religious discharge of her obligations toward husband and children. In short, the examples which the Church puts before us for our encouragement and edification range from world-famed sovereigns, ruling over mighty kingdoms, right down to the poorest and most despised beggars, who, though destitute of this world's goods, were passing rich in the only lasting and solid riches of Heaven. Thus, while on the one hand, we honor as saints King Edward of England and King Louis of France, we also honor and revere quite as sincerely and as devoutly such saints as St. Isidor, who was a common laborer, and the poor beggar, St. Benedict Labré, who used to beg his bread from door to door, like the most destitute outcast of the present day.

Thus, during the passing year, our mother, the Church, draws our attention not to the mere dry pre-

cept of the law, but to its practical expression, as witnessed in the lives of her most illustrious children. In the saints we see the noblest and the highest counsels of perfection actually carried out. Furthermore, we recognize in them our fellow Christians, and our fellow citizens, formed of the same clay and fashioned in the same mold as ourselves; flesh of flesh and blood of our blood. We watch them contending with the same difficulties, beset by the same spiritual enemies, exposed to the same dangers, and a prey to the same evil inclinations and passions. Yet, in spite of all this, we find them steadfast, resolute and conquering all along the line. And, as we follow them, step by step, and see them winning their battles and triumphing over their foes, not indeed by virtue of their own power, but by the grace and help of God, we are fully aware that the divine assistance, which was accorded to them will be as readily accorded to us. God's hands are not shortened, His ability as well as His readiness to help is as great in our case as in theirs. In short, our only legitimate excuse, if we fail, is that we have neither the generosity nor the courage that characterized them. So far from imitating their zeal and earnestness and strong determination to become saints at any price, and cost what it may, we will scarcely move one little finger, or strain one little muscle, even for the sake of winning an eternal crown.

Our Divine Lord tells us that the wise merchant in the Gospel, who, after much time and trouble, found the pearl of great price, became so enamoured with it that he sold all that he had in order to secure possession of it. He did not stop to consider how much the price was. He did not strive to strike a bargain. He did not say he would take it, but only if it could be purchased at a small sum. No! His mind was at once made up, he would have it *at any price*. Consequently, he went off, and, without delay and without hesitation, sold everything he had and bought the precious pearl upon which his whole heart was set. If, dear brethren, we are to secure the heavenly

treasure of Sanctity, we must approach the matter in the same spirit. There must be no hesitancy, no putting off, no balancing of consequences, no doubting and faltering. We must be fully persuaded that Sanctity is worth all that we can offer for it. Or, rather, that it so surpasses in value all the riches of the universe, that we ought to exclaim with the wise man: "I preferred it before kingdoms and thrones, and esteem riches as nothing in comparison to it. Neither did I compare unto it any precious stone, for all gold in comparison to it is as a little sand; and silver in respect to it shall be counted as clay. I loved it above health and beauty, and chose to have it instead of light, for its light cannot be put out. And all good things come to me together with it, and innumerable riches through it." (Wisdom vii. 8.) This high appreciation is most important, because it is only when we have appreciated Sanctity, at its proper value, that we shall be prepared to pay the necessary price for its possession.

Now, nothing so helps us to realize its value as a serious consideration of the joys and delights which are now the lot and portion of the saints in Heaven. We picture them to ourselves amid the splendors and the peace of their eternal home. We watch them exulting before the throne of God, drinking the torrent of His delights, and basking in the bright sunshine of His joy-giving presence. We call to mind their perfect peace, their unfading glory, their freedom from all care and sorrow, their indescribable contentment, and absolute security. We compare the brief moment of their earthly pilgrimage with the endless duration of their acquired joy, we contrast the few short years in which they labored and toiled with the immense weight of glory which those few short years have purchased. We wonder at the insignificance and smallness of the service rendered on the one hand, and at the wholly inconceivable magnificence of the recompense received on the other. And the more we ponder and the more we learn of their privi-

leges and honors, the more our wonder grows and intensifies, until, at last, we are filled with burning envy and we resolve to emulate their example, to walk in their footsteps and to imitate their virtues.

We call to mind the efforts which worldlings make to acquire the worthless riches of this world, we think of their laborious days, of their watchful nights, and of the pains and fatigues to which they cheerfully submit, in order to increase their earthly gains, or to acquire some long-desired honor, or to rise a degree or two in the social scale, and our cheeks grow scarlet with shame and self-reproach, to think that we, who call ourselves Catholics, should be all the while so listless and indifferent regarding the infinitely more admirable rewards of eternity.

What we once regarded as insurmountable difficulties in the path of virtue, melt away so soon as we become better acquainted with the saints of God. Of old, we were want to excuse our tepid life and our feeble attempts at virtue, on the ground of our particular position, or, our evil surroundings, or of the wickedness of the period in which our lot is cast. Or we would find excuse in the difficulties connected with our special duties, and in the trying nature of our environment. But, so soon as we set before us the immense multitude of the saints, we perceive how great is our delusion. For, amongst that glorious host are to be found saints of every walk of life, of every position, of every class and of every variety.

Nay, more, we find both men and women steadily growing to perfection, and advancing in virtue, and attaining to heroic holiness, whose position and surroundings were immeasurelessly more difficult than our own. Often their passions were more violent, and their enemies more persistent, and their chances less, and their obstacles more serious than any which have ever fallen within our experience. But—as a set-off against this—it is only fair to say that they had one quality that is wanting in us. One quality, without which all else is of very little avail. They had an

irresistible resolution; a deep and indomitable will, which was discouragel by no difficulty, and dismayed by no obstacle. They conquered and reached the goal, because they were determined to do their best, to push on to the end, and never to lose courage nor give up the struggle. So long as they made a generous use of the means at their disposal, they knew they were secure. So long as they were faithful to prayer and the Sacraments, and trusted to God alone as the one source of all their strength, they knew, as we all know, that they were bound to win. God has promised to give His grace to all who ask it with humility and perseverance, and to bestow even His greater graces upon those who are found to correspond to His ordinary graces. Who is faithful over few things, He will place over many things. But if we are too indifferent to act up to the ordinary graces God showers down upon us, we thereby render ourselves altogether undeserving of His choicer gifts, without which heroic sanctity is impossible. It is here where we usually fail. We wish to run before we are able to stand upright; to soar along in the hight spiritual altitudes before we have even practiced the art of ordinary walking on even ground.

The example of the saints, however, serves not only to inspire us with a holy longing to follow them in their lives of virtue, and to merit the reward which they now enjoy. It also helps us to know ourselves better, and to keep us humble and lowly in our own eyes.

So long as we compare ourselves only with wordly minded persons and with those who make no pretence to keep the commandments, we may easily rise from the task, quite satisfied with the result. For, if we compare our own lives with those who have never had the grace nor the opportunities that we have had, and who have never been instructed, nor helped by the Sacraments, nor shielded in any way from the occasions of sin, we shall, naturally, appear virtuous enough against such a dark background. Consequently, we shall be apt to flatter ourselves that all is well,

and to take complacency in our own good deeds, and to "imagine ourselves to be something, whereas we are nothing." We are so weak and so blind, and so full of self-love, that the slightest favor conferred upon us by God, or the least success in our spiritual exercises, or the smallest light or unction received by us in prayer, is at once accepted by us as a proof of special virtue. Our poor mortifications, our little acts of penance, our hour of daily meditation, our patience under some slight provocation, are all enough to flatter our vanity and to inflate us with an utterly erroneous estimate of our own spiritual condition.

Then, perhaps, while still puffed up with pride, we are induced to take up the history of some genuine saint. We turn over the pages with interest and admiration, and, as we read on and on, new light seems to be given us, and we soon find ourselves contemplating virtues, in whose light our own seem to lose caste, and to dwindle into puerile insignificance. When we are thus, as it were, brought into contact with a true saint, a healthy sense of our own inferiority takes possession of us. We grow ashamed of our very virtues, which, by comparison, scarcely look like virtues at all, and we begin to confess, painfully and sorrowfully, that, after all, we are not humble, nor charitable, nor patient, nor pure, but only poor and unworthy sinners, loaded with imperfections, and full of innumerable faults and failings. In the person of a canonized saint, we have a proper standard of comparison. We can measure ourselves with him, and thus gain a far truer estimate of our true spiritual misery than we are ever likely to acquire in any other way. The study of the lives of the saints teaches us, indeed, to realize our shortcomings, and our many failings, and steeps us deeper and deeper in humility, and we must all admit that sanctity is very near those who are lowly and humble of heart.

But, in spite of the newly acquired sense of our weakness and sinfulness and general inferiority, we are not, strange to say, dejected nor downcast. On

the contrary, familiarity with the lives of God's greatest servants, greatly contributes to inspire us with courage and confidence. The reason is plain. For, in the saints we contemplate the transforming power of God's grace upon weak human creatures just like ourselves. We may gaze upon the fairest and most perfect amongst them. Yet, however exalted they may be, so soon as we call to mind their origin and history, we find they were born of earthly parents like ourselves, and inherited the very same natural instincts and earthly disposition and evil passions. They possessed the same nature and were subject to the same influences. Before them, as before us, the world spreads its subtle snares, and the flesh its seductive attractions, and the devil his most cunning decoys and pitfalls. There was in them the same attractions toward honors, distinctions, pleasures and sensual delights, as well as the same natural shrinking from pain and contempt and humiliation. In a word, they were men, and possessed all the customary inborn weakness of their race. Yet they triumphed! They overcame every difficulty, trod under foot every obstacle, and lived almost like angels in human bodies. Not, be it ever remembered, by virtue of their own strength, not by virtue of any peculiarity of their composition or organization, but solely by the efficacy and strength of God's all-sufficient grace. Grace was offered to them, and because they corresponded to it with great fidelity, it was poured out upon them in far greater abundance. It illuminated their intellects, it inflamed their wills, it showed them the emptiness of wordly glory, it lifted their thoughts toward heavenly things, and made them long to tread the world and all it contains under foot, that they might merit the reward of the saints. So utterly, indeed, did many of them despise this world, that they preferred its enmity to its friendship, and rejoiced to be unknown and forgotten by men, that they might lose themselves more completely in God.

None are so brave as the saints! They dare all

things, and endure all things, for the sake of Him, whom they love above all. Neither danger nor disgrace, nor torture nor death itself, in its worst form, nor aught else can influence them, nor turn them from their allegiance to the God they love, nor make them forgetful of His service. Who, with such examples to inspire him, can fail to be impressed! Who can fail to feel encouraged? To inspire ourselves, then, with hope and trust, let us lift up our eyes on high, and contemplate them rejoicing in eternal bliss. As the husband-man plowing the rude earth, and exposing himself to the wintry blasts and to the inclemencies of the elements, buoys himself up with the thought of the future harvest, and of the fields, rich and beautiful with golden corn; or, as the captain, tossing on the turbulent, restless ocean, battling with storms and hurricanes, and the numberless other dangers of the deep, comforts himself with the remembrance of the reward, which will be his when he at last brings his rich cargo to land, so should we look up from our daily struggle and toil in the service of God, and contemplate the magnificent recompense awaiting us in the kingdom of our Father.

Life is passing; swiftly and silently the years glide by, and soon we shall find our fragile bark grating upon the eternal shore. Are we preparing for that solemn and awful hour? The time is short and we should, therefore, neglect no means of grace and salvation. Now, one of the simplest and, at the same time, one of the most efficacious and agreeable, is the habit of reading the lives of the saints.

To keep their example ever before our eyes, to fill our minds with their thoughts and sentiments, and to strive to see things and to judge things as they did, will carry us over every difficulty, and will enable us, one day, to secure a place among their own glorious ranks, in the land of eternal peace and cloudless joy, which is a glorious consummation which I sincerely wish you all, in the name of the Father, etc. Amen.

FEAST OF ALL SOULS

Purgatory

Text:—"Have pity on me! Have pity on me! at least you my friends, for the hand of the Lord is heavy upon me."—(*Job xix, 21.*)

THE month of November, on which we are now entering, is dedicated in a special manner to the holy souls in purgatory. Therefore, I need no apology, if I stand here before you to-day, dear brethren, to plead their cause, and to beg your suffrages on their behalf.

If these poor suffering souls were in a position to appeal to you themselves there would be little call for my weak and faltering words. Their deep and agonizing pain would give them a power of expression and an eloquence, compared to which that of a Chrysostom or Demosthenes would sound cold and insipid, so that you would be unable to resist their heart-rending entreaties. But alas! they cannot speak to you themselves. They cannot make known their deplorable condition. The poor and the suffering in *this* world are indeed able to stand before our eyes and to expose their wounds and running sores, and may melt even our hard hearts by the exhibition of their misery; but the souls detained in purgatory can only suffer on in silence and wait, and resign themselves to their fate.

Why, my dear brethren, do we, who might so easily bring them help and consolation and relief, leave them to suffer on and on? And why do we exert ourselves so little on their behalf? Why are we so slow to render them assistance, and to exercise toward them a generous heartfelt charity?

There are, no doubt, many reasons, but if I mistake not, the chief is that we seldom think of the faithful departed. For the space of a few weeks or months after their death, we may perhaps bewail their loss, and remember them in our prayers. But time passes, and

the visible world around us absorbs our attention, and other interests arise, and fresh acquaintances are formed, and new friends take the place of the old, who are soon totally forgotten. In a word, the justice of the old proverb: "Out of sight, out of mind," is but too faithfully proved and exemplified in the conduct of most of us, even toward those whom we have loved best.

Further; even when we do think of our relatives and friends who have passed away, we hardly ever attempt to realize and to bring home to ourselves the immensity and the duration of their sufferings. If a father or a mother or anyone near and dear to us were enduring in this world a hundredth part of their agonizing pain, and were we able, with a little trouble, to relieve them, and ease them of their terrible torture, should we not be ready to do so? Should we not be even glad to exert ourselves to the utmost, and deem it a privilege and a joy, to help to put an end to their misery? Would not the very thought of their gratitude and thankfulness and of their words of hearty appreciation be reward enough for all our care and solicitude? Most assuredly! Then why do we lapse into listless indifference so soon as they have been withdrawn from our sight? Have we suddenly grown heartless? Has our whole nature changed, so that we no longer feel compassion and commiseration? No! That cannot be. It is rather that we utterly fail to realize the awful truth, that there is a region where countless souls are detained on their way to Heaven, and where they are purged and cleansed from the stains of sin, in the cruel flames of purgatory; and that among these must be numbered many friends of our own.

The dogma itself, we, of course, accept. We believe in purgatory, just as we believe in the Trinity, or in the Creation of the world from nothing, *viz.*, because the Church teaches it, but we seldom pause to reflect upon the doctrine or to ask ourselves what it really means. Nor have we tried to form any ac-

curate conception of the bitterness and the terrible severity of the punishment inflicted.

All suffering is bitter. Even earthly suffering is a fearful thing, and few of us can conceive the many torments that may be endured in even a single human body. The racking of neuralgia, the throbbing of fever, the dislocation of limbs, the crushing of bones, the tortures of a hundred different diseases and sicknesses and plagues and epidemics are bad enough to contemplate. Yet, these are, after all, but the sufferings of the poor corruptible body. Of such, we are able to form some notion. But the torments of a disembodied spirit is beyond all experience, and cannot be fully understood by any man living. We have nothing with which we can compare it in this world; nothing that can equal it, within the compass of our limited human experience. That it surpasses all earthly torments is the teaching of theologians, and the view of all spiritual writers. It is also the verdict of the saints, and of all who have been favored with revelations and supernatural visions on the subject.

St. Thomas, the prince of theologians, tells us that those confined in purgatory suffer from the same fire as the damned in hell. It is one and the same flame, he argues, that torment the lost, and that cleanses the saved. The light faults and imperfections and venial offences with which a soul enters purgatory, may be burnt away by this fierce devouring element, and the soul, at last, cleansed, mounts at once, all pure, to Heaven. But the mortal sins and grievous crimes that stain the souls of the damned, are too deeply engrained in the very substance of the soul ever to be cleansed or burnt away, though eternity itself be employed in the process: hence, they must remain forever in the bottomless pit. This is clearly implied in the passage of St. Paul, Epistle to the Corinthians, where he writes: "Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day (of eternity) shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's

work abide, . . . he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire." (1 Cor. iii. 12, 15.)

But these imprisoned souls suffer not only intensely, but continuously. The tedious duration of fearful torment is without interruption. In this world, even the greatest suffering is sometimes interrupted by refreshing sleep—men have been known to swoon away even on the rack—but in the next world there is no sleep and no cessation so long as the soul is detained. This is a second motive, urging us to come to their assistance.

A third motive arises from their helplessness, and their utter inability to aid themselves. In this life, they could gain many graces and privileges, and were afforded innumerable opportunities of atoning for sin and of satisfying the claims of Divine justice. But all this ceased, so soon as they passed out of life. Now, they must remain passive under their affliction. They can do nothing whatever to alleviate their suffering. They lie like men bound fast, hand and foot, and incapable of assisting themselves. On the other hand, they are perfectly well aware that we, who call ourselves their friends, might do an immense deal for them, if only we would. They are keenly alive to the fact that our prayers and our penances, our almsdeeds and our Communions and above all, the holy sacrifice of the Mass, can bring them rest and solace, joy and peace, and a speedy end to their torments, but they also see that, for the most part, we seldom give the matter a thought, or trouble ourselves about them at all.

What must be their surprise, when they note the indifference and coldness of the many near relations and dearly loved companions, whom they have left behind them. What must be their feelings, when they think that instead of helping them, these so-called friends are intent only on their own amusement and

enjoyment? and that those who have inherited their possessions, and have been enriched by their legacies and gifts have scarcely a thought to bestow upon them in the hour of their greatest need! Do they not seem to stretch out their hands in supplication toward us? Cannot we hear them, in spirit, crying out in their dire distress: "Have pity on me! Have pity on me! At least, you my friends; for the hand of the Lord is heavy upon me." Picture to yourselves a soul in purgatory, yearning for prayers, Masses, and alms to be offered up for him; and instead of that, watching his mourning relatives spending their money on worthless flowers and wreaths to place above his mouldering corpse! Or putting up a costly monument or raising to his memory an expensive marble head-stone. The elaborate funeral, with its coaches, its black horses with sable plumes, and its hired mutes and attendants, may impress the passer-by, but can bring no refreshment to those who are purging out their imperfections in penal fires. How bitter and almost insufferable must be the sight of such purely earthly displays of grief to one who has entered into the world of great and eternal realities! One earnest *de profundis,* or even a single burning ejaculation is, to him, worth more than a whole city draped in black, or an entire churchyard piled with wreaths and exotic flowers. Spiritual help is what the dead seek. The gift of flowers will not assuage their thirst, nor will all the well-known garments and trappings of woe quench the agony that writhes their souls.

A fourth motive urging us to help them is found in the fact that the souls in purgatory are the friends and servants of God. Nay more, they are the holy and innocent children of the Eternal Father, who longs to welcome them Home, and to fold them to His bosom in an eternal embrace. For their sins, so far, at all events, as the guilt is concerned, have already been blotted out. And though they are still suffering the consequences of past offences, the sin itself has long since been forgiven and forgotten. Hence, we should

do all in our power to obtain their release, and a place for them in the Heavenly Kingdom.

A fifth motive is of a somewhat more personal character. We should feel anxious to assist these suffering souls, so that we may thereby win their affection, and awaken their love. For, consider, on the one hand, that, though its actual reception may be delayed, yet they are absolutely certain of their crown. In a few weeks, months, or years, they are perfectly certain of being admitted into Heaven. For them, all risks are now over. All dangers are now passed. Their salvation is assured, and God will soon call them into His own blessed home. And once there, can they forget those who have hastened the hour of their entry? Can they be unmindful of the sacrifices, and the loving supplications, the Communions and the Masses that have been so generously and so compassionately offered on their behalf? No! It is impossible. There is no such thing as selfishness or ingratitude in Heaven.* Every act performed by those below by way of suffrage will be treasured up and remembered with thankfulness by the blessed who have profited by them. Thus, we shall find very many and powerful advocates helping us from their thrones above, whom we should never otherwise have been able to reckon among our special benefactors and friends. They will watch over us, and show an interest and a solicitude for us, so long as life lasts. If, dear brethren, we value the prayers of holy men upon earth, and frequently seek their aid, how much more reason have we to make use of a means, which will secure us, the far more powerful assistance of those, who in a short time will be enjoying the beatic vision, and the beatitude of the saints. Let us then resolve to succor them now, while we have the chance, that they may render us a similar service in the hour of

* Even before their entry into Heaven, they can probably help us by their prayers; though not with the same effect. "*Etsi hae animae sibi nihil facere possunt, quia sunt in termino, est tamen sententia pia, eas se invicem et etiam nos per suffragia sua adjuvare posse.*"

our greatest need, when we, in our turn, shall find ourselves in the prison-house of God, and suffering amid the cleansing flames.

Many other motives for exercising compassion might be added to the foregoing, but before concluding, we wish to say a word or so upon two other points: The first concerns the special class of suffering souls who have a more direct and personal claim upon us; and the second concerns the best and most efficacious means to be adopted to bring them relief.

As to the first: there must be many now groaning in purgatory, who are very closely related to us by ties of blood, and whose love and many past kindnesses we now have an excellent opportunity of repaying. Surely! we should not let such a chance escape us unheeded! Many among you have lost your parents. Then call to mind all that you owe to them, who, under God's Providence, were the authors of your being. Reflect on the deep affection and anxious solicitude with which they watched over you, during the years of your infancy and early childhood—a solicitude which, perhaps, you have never repaid. Think of how gently they chided you, how carefully they provided for you, and how patiently they bore with you, in spite of your many faults and failings. In their efforts to train and educate you, and in their consideration for your spiritual and bodily health, what a world of disinterested love was poured out upon you. Shall we now forget them? Shall we deny their claim upon us? Shall we suffer such an opportunity of proving our gratefulness to go by without seizing it? O! Perhaps at this very moment it is on our account that they suffer, and because they were overindulgent in their dealings with us. Perhaps they are now detained amid the flames of purgatory, on account of their over-fondness, their excessive tenderness, in refusing to correct us and to punish us with fitting severity, and for having spoilt us by overindulgence and too much adulation. Surely, we have motive enough

here, to excite within us the strongest desire of aiding them by our prayers.

From parents, we may pass on to consider sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts and other near relatives to whom we owe so much, and in whose love we have had so large a share.

Another class who seem to have more than an ordinary claim upon us, are those from whom we have received special favors and benefits, such as our school masters, instructors, superiors and counselors—in short, all such as have toiled and labored for our welfare, by teaching, exhorting and encouraging us. Among such may be enumerated the priests, who have baptized us, and absolved us, and fed us with the Bread of life, and helped us in a hundred ways to avoid evil and to do good; our venerable Bishops, who have watched over us, as shepherds over their sheep, with so much interest and care; and the Sovereign Pontiff, by whose wise direction and solemn words of warning or of entreaty we have all benefited.

Another class, to whom we owe a special debt, consists of those who are suffering the penalty of sins, into which we, perhaps, have led them by our foolish words, or our evil example. Souls whose innocence and purity we have injured and sullied by our own worldliness, carelessness, dissipation, irregular conduct, and irreverent or scandalous manners. How many suffering souls there must be, who rightfully regard us as, at least in part, the authors of their woe. Souls who are now expiating venial offences and imperfections, into which we, alas! have drawn them. If we grow angry, do we not often cause others to lose their temper? If we indulge in uncharitable conversation, do we not offer the occasion to others to do likewise? Have we never lent a dangerous book, or pointed out a suggestive paragraph in the newspaper, or encouraged evil by looks or words or an approving smile: or invited friends to places of dangerous amusements, or in any other way been the occasion of their falls, at least into venial sins and moral delinquences?

This may have been done often, and although perhaps, almost unconsciously, yet the result is the same. These sins must be burnt out in the flames of purgatory.

I should like to say a word here about those souls, who have none to pray for them, or to take an interest in them, and to point out their claim on our commiseration. But I have already detained you too long, so I must pass at once to the question of ways and means of rendering them assistance.

Of all the means at our disposal there is none so powerful as the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. There Jesus Christ stretches out his Divine hands, with the sacred wounds still visible on them, toward His Heavenly Father, on behalf of His own brethren. He offers Himself up in atonement and satisfaction, and obtains for them countless blessings and consolations, which could scarcely be abtained in any other way. Then get as many Masses as you can said for the holy souls. And if you find any difficulty in this, at least assist at the adorable Sacrifice yourselves as often and as devoutly as possible, and lift up your own voices in unison with that of Jesus, so that your petitions being offered together with Him, may be more certain of a favorable hearing.

Then we may offer our Communions, our penances and our almsdeeds for the same purpose, each according to the measure of his opportunity.

In addition to this, we can always offer up our prayers. And when we have the holy souls in view, we should select, by preference, prayers that are indulgenced. Indulgenced prayers are now exceedingly numerous, and there is no difficulty in making a selection; but if we may venture to recommend certain forms of prayer more than others, they would be the Stations of the Cross and the Holy Rosary; since these, beyond others, have been enriched by many Sovereign Pontiffs, and are most efficacious.

In conclusion, let us resolve in the first place, to watch over ourselves more carefully, so that we may

live a life as free as possible from every deliberate venial sin: and, in the second place, to do all we can to atone for the various imperfections into which we are betrayed by our human frailty; so that when the end comes, and life, at last, fails, we may be detained in purgatory for the shortest possible time, before being admitted into the Home of everlasting joy and happiness above.

FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS

The Soul of a Child

Text:—"These follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."—(*From the Gospel.*)

GOD is the infinitely beautiful; and in some dim, shadowy way His beauty is reflected in all that His hands have made. Everywhere and in everything we can recognize His art; but He seems to have conferred upon youth — as though it had come more recently from His hands — a special loveliness of its own. This is so true that youth and beauty seem to be almost synonymous terms.

The "youth" or, what we call the spring, of the year is the most beautiful of the seasons. There is a freshness, a brightness, and a tenderness in leaf and blossom, in the fields and woods, and country lanes, such as we look for in vain later in the year. What is true of the vegetative creation is equally true of the animal. The young of almost every living thing are exceptionally pretty and engaging both in form and movement. There are about them a gracefulness, a playfulness, and an attractiveness, which cheer the heart and delight the senses, and which are rarely to be found in their maturer condition.

And if this be the case as regards birds and beasts, it is still more decidedly so as regards the young of our own race. There is hardly any living and visible creature so interesting as a little child. We are assured, in inspired words, that our Blessed Lord loved to gather the children around Him, saying: "Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." He looked upon them with affection, and He delighted in them on account of their simplicity, their trustfulness, their innocence, and their purity and candor.

Children must be reckoned amongst the greatest gifts to man, in the natural order; for they afford him some of the purest joys and delights of his life. They help to brighten the gloom of this sad earth by their exuberant spirits and their spontaneous gaiety and mirth. They help us to forget our cares. They recall our own happy childhood and youth. They are a comfort and a consolation to their parents in their declining years, who look upon them as destined to carry on their name and to hand down the traditions of the family, and to pray for them long after they have been laid to rest beneath the green sod in the quiet churchyard.

But there is one point which fond parents sometimes forget, and that is that children are not only a joy but also a most tremendous responsibility—a responsibility which cannot be shirked, and for which, one day, a most rigorous account will have to be rendered. Let me invite your attention, dear readers, for a few minutes while I strive to convince you of this most practical fact.

Just consider any little child over whom the cleansing waters of Baptism have recently been poured. What a poor, weak, insignificant creature it is! Its existence began, a few weeks or months ago, in a mere germ of matter. It was only a speck in a region of darkness; a feeble substance in a great hazard, but with a vast capacity for greater good, which was as yet in the hand of God and of His providence. Then God vitalized that germinal body with a living soul. That soul had its powers still folded in darkness, like the rose in the bud, awaiting another and a higher Intelligence to unfold it into light and action.

For many weeks and months, the infant remains helpless and dependent, and wholly incapable of doing anything for itself. Yet what a wonderful being it really is! Within that tiny form there dwells an immortal soul—a soul made to the image and likeness of God Himself, the eternal and uncreated Beauty. It is a soul absolutely pure. Not only is there no stain

or scar upon it, but it is resplendent and glowing with divine grace. The spiritual beauty conferred upon it by the Sacrament of Regeneration exceeds all the beauty of earth, and surpasses all thought and imagination. So exquisitely lovely is it that it is fit to enter at once into the unveiled presence of God, and to take up its abode in heaven, among the angels and archangels. In fact, were some sudden death to destroy its body and set the soul free, it would actually pass, without hindrance, into the bright realms of light above.

Furthermore, that child of yours is destined to live forever. Reflect for a moment upon what that means. All else will pass; nations and kingdoms will rise and fall; the heavens and the earth will one day be dissolved; the very stars will fade, the sun itself will grow dim; but forever and forever, so long as God is God, that child will live on, either as a glorious saint in heaven, or else as a lost and imprisoned soul in hell. And it is you, its parents, who will, to a very large extent, determine its choice. Who shall weigh the responsibility, who shall measure the consequences of culpable neglect?

Yes; that innocent babe, that you clasp in your arms or press lovingly to your bosom, is destined to praise God forever amid the unspeakable delights of Paradise or else to curse Him forever in company with the spirits of darkness, in the infernal regions. He is *now* innocent, spotless, undefiled; but who shall say what he will become in twenty or thirty years' time? He is safe—but only for a while. Once baptized, he remains secure until he reaches the full use of reason, and has to enter the lists, and contend in mortal combat with the devil, the world, and the flesh. Then his danger begins. Strong, tireless and pitiless enemies are already on the alert. Already they are busily planning how to rob him of that which is more precious than all the treasures of this world. I mean his innocence, which is his sole passport into eternal life. He has to face the world, with all its seductions and dangerous allurements; the flesh, and all its

deadly snares and attractions; and the devil, with his hosts of fallen angels, who are in league with one another to draw him into sin, that he may be condemned and damned like them.

Am I drawing a fanciful picture? Am I needlessly alarmed? Is this a vain fear? Is it a groundless apprehension? On the contrary, it is a certainty which should fill us with anxiety. Who, indeed, will calculate the multitudes of those who have already been ruined and despoiled, and dragged down to hell! Place before the eyes of your imagination the basest and most degraded criminal that the world has ever known. Look steadily upon the very worst offender among the reprobate, who now writhes in the lowest depth of the "bottomless pit," and as you turn aside, terrified and dismayed at the revolting sight, remember that that debased criminal was once—and perhaps not so many years ago—a sweet, laughing, innocent, joyous child, with a beautiful soul reflecting something of the uncreated loveliness of God Himself.

How are we to explain the undoubted fact, that one child will grow up and develop into a reprobate, and another into a saint? How is it that, although starting, as it were, from the selfsame point, one will develop in one direction, and the other in exactly the opposite? Of two infants, born perhaps on the same day and in the same town, why does one become a St. Aloysius or a St. Francis, while the other becomes an inhuman monster, like a Nero or a Caligula?

One cannot, of course, point to any single, exclusive cause. There are, no doubt, a vast number of different forces at work at the same time; and, in explaining the phenomenon, a great variety of important circumstances must be taken into account. But we have no hesitation in saying that the chief and by far the predominant influence upon the future of the child arises from its home training and early education. Hence, it follows that those whose duty it is to train their children are weighted with a most tre-

mendous responsibility. The task committed to them by Almighty God is a splendid but a most solemn one.

Some persons seem to imagine that children are good and virtuous by nature This is a mistake. Experience proves that a child, when left to itself, becomes selfish, envious, self-willed, disobedient—spoiled. It needs the most careful handling, and gentle but firm guiding. From the earliest age, it must be lovingly checked and corrected, and induced to subdue its passions, to give up its will, and to hold its unruly desires and evil inclinations under control. It must be taught modesty, respect for authority, and consideration for others. And—a serious point—the lesson must be conveyed and impressed more by example than by precept; for the undeveloped mind is extremely impressionable, and very strongly affected by what it observes in others.

From this it may be readily inferred how vitally important is the example set by parents and teachers. Even persons of mature age are insensibly and unconsciously influenced by the company they keep and by the society in which they move. Indeed, everyone, whatever his character, will find it easier to live a virtuous life if he be surrounded by holy and God-fearing men, than if he lives among profligates and notorious sinners; for the simple reason that every man is influenced by the nature of his environment. The infallible Spirit of God assures us: "With the holy one thou wilt be holy; and with the valiant perfect. With the elect thou wilt be elect; and with the perverse thou wilt be perverted." *

Now, if that be a fact with men and women of full growth, it must be far truer still in the case of the young and the undeveloped, since they are immeasurably more sensitive and responsive to every impression; and also because it is their nature to look up to

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* 2 Kings, xxii, 26, 27. Note.—This text really refers, not to man but to God in His dealings with us, His unworthy subjects. But, by what is called "*Accommodation*," the words of the text are often used to show the influence of companionship. It is in that sense, that I employ them here.

and imitate those who are set over them, and to accept them as their models and examples. We find illustrations of this in every parish. Parents who are sober and honest, and faithful to their religious duties; who show a real reverence for Holy Mass, are devout to the Mother of God, and frequent the Sacraments regularly, will draw their children after them as the magnet draws steel, and will find no difficulty in bringing them up in the way in which they should go. On the other hand, when parents are careless and indifferent, and neglectful of their duties to God, and perhaps even intemperate and quarrelsome and of dissolute habits, their children will grow up godless and self-willed, and will be an unending source of trouble and anxiety to the zealous pastor who is placed in charge of their souls.

It has often been remarked that the great saints have almost invariably been blessed with good and virtuous parents, who have instilled into the tender hearts of their little ones a love and an admiration of divine things. Being themselves models of virtue, and on fire with the Love of God, they seemed able to infuse some of their own zeal and fervor into their offspring, and to communicate to them, during their daily intercourse, a share of their own spirit. And this could scarcely be otherwise; for, even unconsciously, a child will always try to see things through its mother's eyes, and will judge all that comes before it according to her standard.

As one instance out of a thousand, of a mother's power, consider that of Blanche of Castile, who brought into the world the great St. Louis, King of France. We may surely say that she was, under God's most loving providence, the cause of his heroic sanctity. In all history it would be hard to find a more truly devoted or a more admirable mother. Unlike so many mothers of the present day, she was much more concerned about her son's spiritual than about his corporal well-being: much more anxious that he should be high in God's favor than in any one else's.

In a word, her love was a true love—a love founded and resting upon the rock-bed of eternal truth. She knew, as every genuine Catholic knows, that innocence is man's highest treasure; that one degree of supernatural grace outvalues the richest of all kingdoms and principalities; and that the friendship of God is immeasurably more important than any conceivable advantage which the world can offer.

She not only knew this, but to some extent she realized it, and acted upon it. With her it was no mere abstract theory, but a profound truth destined to shape and mould her whole conduct, day by day and hour by hour. Hence she was careful to let her son, from earliest youth, feel and understand that there is nothing so priceless as virtue, and nothing so ennobling as the love and the service of God. Again and again she would address him in burning words concerning the love and the loyalty which he owed God, from Whom he had received all he had. Again and again, as his childish mind began little by little to develop, she would take him into her arms and exhort him to purity and holiness. "My darling," she would exclaim, "though I love you with all the strength and passion of a mother's love, yet I would rather a thousand times see you lying cold and dead at my feet than that you should ever live to offend God by mortal sin!"

Such was the mother of the future King of France. No wonder that he grew up a noble and saintly boy. No wonder he esteemed virtue and the favor of God beyond all else. No wonder that he kept himself free from sin and all defilement, and at last attained to heroic sanctity and to a place among the canonized saints. For the Holy Spirit of God assures us: "A young man according to his way, even when he is old he will not depart from it."*

What a change would come over the world in a single generation if all parents showed as great an interest in the real and eternal welfare and happiness

* Prov. xxii. 6.

of their children as did Blanche of Castile, and if they were to employ their immense influence to the same noble purpose! But alas! many are so earthly-minded that they are ready to sacrifice what is eternal for what is temporal; and will deliberately expose their sons and daughters, without any remorse, to a thousand dangers; in some cases, by sending them to non-Catholic schools; in others by allowing them to associate with evil companions, or to read dangerous books, or to browse, without check or direction, on the most objectionable daily papers, and "Penny Dreadfuls" and "Shilling Shockers," which create a morbid taste, excite a dangerous curiosity and often lead to most disastrous consequences; or what is still worse, by permitting them to assist at, and sometimes even to take part in, immodest dances or impure plays and spectacles, and so forth. Indeed, the carelessness and indifference and apathy of some parents, so far as the higher and eternal interests of children are concerned, are as unintelligible as they are inexcusable. It betrays a sad want of vivid faith and a strange insensibility to the strict account they will have to render to Almighty God. Let me exhort them to take the matter seriously to heart, and to resolve to do all they possibly can to promote the spiritual welfare of those dear little ones. Their Heavenly Father has entrusted them to the keeping of earthly parents, to train up in His Love and service, during the brief school time of the present life, that they may spend their never ending holidays happily with Him, in His own glorious Home above.

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